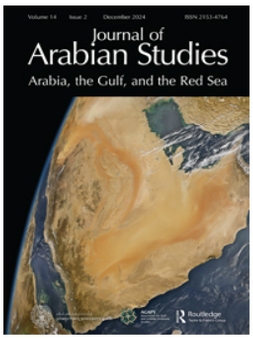


Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Arabian Studies
Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea

ISSN: 2153-4764 (Print) 2153-4780 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjab20

Cultural Cousins: Indo-Gulf Connections since Antiquity

James Onley

To cite this article: James Onley (2024) Cultural Cousins: Indo-Gulf Connections since Antiquity, Journal of Arabian Studies, 14:2, 217-270, DOI: 10.1080/21534764.2025.2488152

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2025.2488152

Published online: 22 May 2025.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1585

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 1 View citing articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rjab20

Journal of Arabian Studies 14.2 (December 2024), pp. 217–270
https://doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2025.2488152

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
Check for updates

Cultural Cousins: Indo-Gulf Connections since Antiquity

JAMES ONLEY

Abstract: This article offers the most comprehensive study to date of the broad spectrum of connections between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf from the earliest archaeological evidence from the 26th century BCE to the present day, from language and concepts to trade, finance, material culture, and cuisine. It argues that the peoples of these two regions share more than history: they are cultural cousins. By deconstructing aspects of Arabian and Indian culture and reframing their histories, it seeks to reconnect two regions separated by the silos of areas studies and modern national narratives by illustrating the profound cultural and historical impact each has had on the other. It does so by explaining the deep structural forces behind Indo-Gulf connections and then surveying and discussing key aspects and examples of this ancient relationship.

Keywords: India; Indian subcontinent, Persian Gulf, Arabia, merchants, trade, monsoon, Sindbad, material culture, language, Estado da Índia, British Indian Empire

1 Introduction

India, as the Indian subcontinent was known until 1947, and the Persian Gulf region, comprised of eastern Arabia, southern Iran, and south-central Iraq, have been interconnected for time immemorial despite being geographically separate. Before the oil era, the peoples of the Persian Gulf had long looked towards the Indian Ocean for their supplies and sources of prosperity. Their maritime orientation, more often towards India than anywhere else, has profoundly influenced their history and culture. The Gulf has long been enmeshed in the movement of goods, people, and cultures between East and West: from the ancient maritime trade routes between the Indus

James Onley is the Ahmed Seddiqi Chair in Gulf and Middle Eastern Studies and Professor of History in the Department of International Studies, American University of Sharjah, PO Box 26666, Sharjah, UAE, jonley@aus.edu.

Author's note: This study draws on earlier work done for an exhibition I curated in 2019–20 at Qatar National Library entitled *Qatar, India & the Gulf: History, Culture & Society*, for which QNL published a limited-edition catalogue in 2019, which is no longer available to the public. This article reframes and greatly expands that work in order to explain *why* India and the Persian Gulf are cultural cousins.

For their contributions, input, and advice, I would like to thank (in alphabetical order) Rizwan Ahmad, Soumyen Bandyopadhyay, Fahad Bishara, Rob Carter, John P. Cooper, Chhaya Goswami, Mohammad Al-Habib, M.H. Ilias, N. Janardhan, Tony Jashanmal, Prashant Kidambi, Steffen Terp Laursen, Sandhya Rao Mehta, Adam Noeman (who co-designed the maps in Figures 1 and 2 with me), Gerd Nonneman, A.K. Pasha, Vimal Purecha (who provided the photo in Figure 18), Mohamed Seyeed, Fatemeh Teimoorzadeh, Muneer Toprani, and Neha Vora. I also want to thank Qatar National Library (especially Shadi Ghonim who co-designed the maps in Figures 17, 21, and 22 with me, and Christopher Alario, now at Northwestern University in Qatar, for his advice on maps); the Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum (especially Kees Wieringa and Jacob van Gulik); and the British Library (especially Richard Davies and Lynda Barraclough). Finally, I would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers of this article for their valuable feedback.

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2025 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Valley Civilization (Pakistan and Gujarat), Dilmun (Bahrain), Mesopotamia (Iraq), and Elam (Iran) in the 26th century BCE to the global air and sea networks linking the Gulf to the wider world today. Throughout this time, India often loomed large over the horizon, attracting most of the Gulf's exports and supplying much of what made life possible in the days before oil. This *Times* article from 1945 by its Bahrain correspondent aptly describes the importance of India to the Gulf:

> The Persian Gulf has closer ties with India than with Iraq, Egypt, and the Levant. Most of its trade is with India; food supplies come from India; and Bombay is the market for pearls before they are sent to Europe. The number of Arabs who travel from the Gulf to Egypt is small in comparison to the number who pay regular and lengthy visits to India. The political future of India is a matter of more interest here than the situation in Palestine.[1]

Today, the South Asian connection is more apparent than ever with the presence of almost nine million Indians and over four million Pakistanis living and working in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, giving the neighbourhoods in which they predominate the feel of Indian or Pakistani towns.

This study of Indo-Gulf connections from the 26th century BCE to the present day examines the depth and dynamics of this ancient relationship — something most citizens of modern-day India and the GCC states are either unaware of or have only a vague notion of today. This absence of awareness is due to the national narratives of cultural purity and historical self-sufficiency promoted by the governments of India and the GCC states and the fact that scholarship on the two regions has long occurred in separate area study silos.[2] The significance of India's historical ties with the Gulf region only becomes apparent after reading the numerous case studies of Indo-Gulf connections — on subjects like seafaring, trade, diaspora, Islam, empire, or foreign relations — and then reviewing key surveys of Indian Ocean history to imagine how these case studies might form part of some bigger picture.

While most *longue durée* studies of the Indian Ocean touch on some aspect of Indo-Gulf connections, none have focused on this exclusively or surveyed the substance and significance of those connections since Antiquity.[3] This is the first study to do so. A full treatment of the subject would require multiple volumes. The purpose of this article is to prepare the way by sketching the outlines of the bigger picture through a discussion of the key aspects and examples

[1] Bahrain correspondent, "Peace on the Persian Gulf", *The Times*, 22 December 1945, p. 5.

[2] For studies of the Hindu (Hindutva) nationalist narrative promoted in India, see the works by Aiyar, Jain and Lasseter, Traub, Truschke, and Visweswaran et al in section 2 of the Bibliography; and for studies of the Arab nationalist narrative embraced in the GCC states, see the works by Al-Etaibi, Al-Nakib, AlMutawa, Al-Rasheed, Bishara (2020), Erskine-Loftus et al, Kelly, Partrick, Parvez, and Varrel.

[3] The *longue durée* (long duration) is the French Annales School approach to history that focuses on long-term historical structures and patterns, such as the influence of the natural environment and ancient trade routes on societies. The *longue durée* is the duration of a particular historical system, so it is central to world-systems analysis. The approach was popularised by Fernand Braudel through the English editions of his works listed in section 2 of the Bibliography. The key *longue durée* studies of the Indian Ocean's long-distance networks that include Indo-Gulf connections are the works by Abu-Lughod, Alpers and Goswami, Beaujard, Bhacker (2009), Chandra, K.N. Chaudhuri, Curtin, Das Gupta and Pearson, Frank, Kearney, McPherson, Panikkar, Patel, Ray and Alpers, Risso (1995, 2019), Sheriff, Toussaint, Villiers (1952), and Yajima (1977) listed in section 2 of the Bibliography. Other important works of shorter periods are those by Bishara and Risso, Bose (2006), Cole, Das Gupta (1994, 2001), Laursen and Steinkeller, Mathew, Olijdam and Spoor, and Risso (2009) listed in the same section. For a review of this literature, see the works by Arasaratnam, Bishara (2016, 2020), Borsa, Bose (2002), K.N. Chaudhuri (1993), Hofmeyr, Low, Margariti, Prange, and Vink in the same section.

of this ancient relationship, from language and concepts to trade, finance, material culture, and cuisine. This article argues that the peoples of these two regions share more than history: they are cultural cousins. By deconstructing aspects of Arabian and Indian culture and reframing their histories, it seeks to reconnect two regions separated by the silos of areas studies and modern national narratives.

This article starts with a symbolic example to impress upon its readers the profoundness of Indo-Gulf connections and why the subject is deserving of greater study: the Gulf origins of "India" as a name and a concept — the subject of section 2. Section 3 then zooms out to explain how the dense web of Indo-Gulf connections came about over millennia: the long-distance shipping routes across the Arabian Sea, one of three "transregional corridors" linking India with the western Indian Ocean, made possible by the monsoon winds, which are symbolized by the story of Sindbad the Sailor and the origin of his name. Section 3 also explains how the sailing, pearling, and date-harvest seasons were synchronized and economically interdependent. It discusses the network of ports linking India and the Gulf, and the significance of the trade between them over the *longue durée* of 4,600 years. It considers the scope and examples of this trade: the Gulf's traditional exports to India and its major imports from India. The resulting importance of Indian finance and currency in the pre-oil Gulf is the subject of section 4, while section 5 considers the impact of these commercial connections on Gulf material culture, from house doors to headdress. Section 6 builds on this with a study of the broader cultural confluence that resulted from the nearly five thousand years of connections across the Arabian Sea. Section 7 then offers a case study of the very embodiment of those connections: the Gulf's Indian communities. Section 8 outlines the many empires that have joined the Gulf and the Indian subcontinent together since the 6th century BCE, focusing on the most recent: the Portuguese Indian Empire and the British Indian Empire of the 16th to 20th centuries. Finally, section 9 surveys Indo-Gulf relations in the 21st century and argues that the return of bilateral ties between India and the GCC states to their traditional levels of intensity over the past decade is, in fact, the restoration of a natural balance.

2 The Gulf origins of "India"

The deep connections between the Persian Gulf and India meant that the two have influenced each other in profound ways over the course of 4,600 years, with the Gulf having the greater impact of the two. The Gulf origins of "India" — *al-Hind* (الهند in Arabic), *Hindūstān* (هندوستان in Persian) — as both a name and a concept is a good illustration of this. The people of the Persian Gulf were the first to see South Asians as "Indians", long before Indians themselves. Indian collective identity emerged through contact with the wider world, starting with the Persian Gulf, as André Wink explains:

> In a political-geographical sense, "India" or *al-Hind*, throughout the medieval period, was an Arab or Muslim conception. The Arabs, like the Greeks, adopted a pre-existing Persian term, but they were the first to extend its application to the entire Indianized region from Sindh and Makran to the Indonesian Archipelago and mainland Southeast Asia. It therefore appears to us as if the Indians or Hindus acquired a collective identity in interaction with Islam.[4]

[4] Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* 1: *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, 7th–11th Centuries*, 3rd edn (2002), p. 5

The emergence of the idea of India can be understood through its etymology. "India" derives — through Ancient Greek *Indós* (Ινδός) and Latin *India* — from *Hindūs*, the Old Persian name for the *Sindhū* (the Sanskrit name for the Indus River), which flowed through the heartland of the Indus Valley Civilization (3300–1300 BCE). Hindūs later became a province of Persia's Achaemenid Empire during 518 to 323 BCE and early Parthian Empire (*c.*120s BCE–50s CE). Around the 1st century CE, the Parthians added the suffix *-stān* (land) to create *Hindūstān* (Land of the Hindus) — the Middle Persian name for the province during the later Parthian Empire (*c.*50s–210s CE) and Persia's Sasanid Empire during 284 to 410 CE. From this name, a person from the province came to be called a *Hindū* or *Hindūstānī* (plural *Hunūd*), which, in Modern Persian, means a Hindu or Indian more generally. These were also the terms used by the Persian-speaking rulers of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughal Empire (1526–1857) for their domains and subjects.

The Arabs, however, preferred Arabized versions of the Old Persian names: *al-Hind* (India) and *al-Hindī* (Indian; plural *al-Hunūd*). By the time of the Arab conquest of Sindh in 711–12 CE, *al-Hind* had expanded in meaning to encompass the whole Indian subcontinent, of which *al-Sind* (Sindh) formed a part. Indians naturally had their own names for India, such as *Bhārat* (the holy Sanskrit name for India and the official Hindi name for the country since 1950), but the Arab and Persian names of *Hind* and *Hindūstān* were equally common before independence, along with their modern-day derivative, "India". After independence, *Hindūstān* fell into disuse and "India" was adopted as the official English name for the country in 1950. Its continued use is a legacy of the subcontinent's ancient connections with the Persian Gulf.

3 The Indo-Gulf transregional corridor

3.1 Transregional corridors of the western Indian Ocean

The reason the India and Persian Gulf share so much history and culture is that the shipping routes connecting them form a "transregional corridor" across the Arabian Sea that dates back to the emergence of ocean seafaring itself 4,600 years ago. See Figure 1 for a map of the Indo-Gulf corridor, which is also comprised of smaller socio-economic zones listed in Table I. The Indo-Gulf corridor is the oldest cultural crossroads in the world, what Philippe Beaujard describes as "the first globalized economic and cultural space of the western Indian Ocean."[5] The flow of ships, people, goods, money, culture, religion, technology, information, and knowledge through this corridor naturally fluctuated over time, as Tables II and III show. Also see Table VIII for the principal ports and towns of the Indian subcontinent trading with the Persian Gulf. Trade through the Indo-Gulf corridor occurred both directly between key ports and indirectly through them and their transshipment networks. The Indo-Gulf corridor also connected the overland Silk Road through Central Asia and northern Iran with the western Indian Ocean. Periods of high trade intensity in the Indo-Gulf corridor led to mutual influence and even confluence when parts of the two regions became integrated into the same networks, systems, and structures at various times, allowing for the emergence of a transregional public sphere of merchants and mariners. The Arabian Sea between India and the Gulf was not a barrier, it often bound these regions together, as it does today.

The Indo-Gulf corridor is one of three transregional corridors linking India with the western Indian Ocean, as the maps in Figure 1 show. The western Indian Ocean's four regions — western India, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and East Africa — are each comprised of smaller socio-economic zones, listed in Table I. The emergence of seasonal shipping routes

[5] Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean: A Global History* 1: *From the Fourth Millennium BCE to the Sixth Century CE* (2019), p. 91.

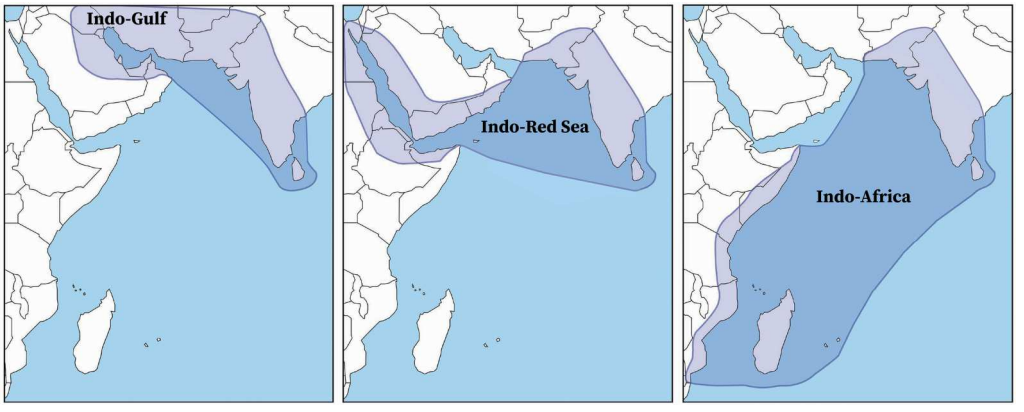


Figure 1: India's transregional corridors in the western Indian Ocean[6]

Table I: India's transregional corridors in the western Indian Ocean and their socio-economic zones (in order of proximity, far-near-far)

INDO-GULF CORRIDOR	INDO-RED SEA CORRIDOR	INDO-AFRICA CORRIDOR
Western India:	***Western India:***	***Western India:***
• Malabar Coast • Konkan Coast • Rajasthan • Punjab • Gujarat • Kachchh (Kutch) • Sindh • Balochistan	• Malabar Coast • Konkan Coast • Rajasthan • Punjab • Gujarat • Kachchh (Kutch) • Sindh • Balochistan	• Malabar Coast • Konkan Coast • Rajasthan • Punjab • Gujarat • Kachchh (Kutch) • Sindh • Balochistan
Persian Gulf:	***Red Sea:***	***East Africa:***
• Gulf of Oman • Lower Gulf • Central Gulf • Upper Gulf • Basra • Baghdad	• Sharqiya Coast (Oman) • Dhofari Coast (Oman) • Socotra (Yemen) • Gulf of Aden • Lower Red Sea • Central Red Sea • Upper Red Sea • Gulf of Aqaba • Gulf of Suez	• Benadir/Somaili Coast • Swahili/Zanj Coast (Kenya, Tanzania) • Sofala Coast (Mozambique) • Comoros • Madagascar • Mauritius & Réunion

connecting these regions depended upon the Indian Ocean's monsoon winds and ocean currents, which favoured their formation.[7] The relative ease of sailing between ports like Bombay and Bandar Abbas and the frequency of travel between them contrasts sharply

[6] Maps designed by James Onley and Adam Noeman, 2024.

[7] For an analysis of the emergence of maritime trade routes, see: Yajima, *The Arab Dhow Trade in the Indian Ocean* (1976); Yajima, "Maritime Activities of the Arab Gulf People and the Indian Ocean World in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 14 (1977), pp. 195–208; and Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean* 1: *From the Fourth Millennium BCE to the Sixth Century CE*, pp. 1–7.

Table II: Trade intensity through the Indo-Gulf corridor, 2600 BCE–present (table)

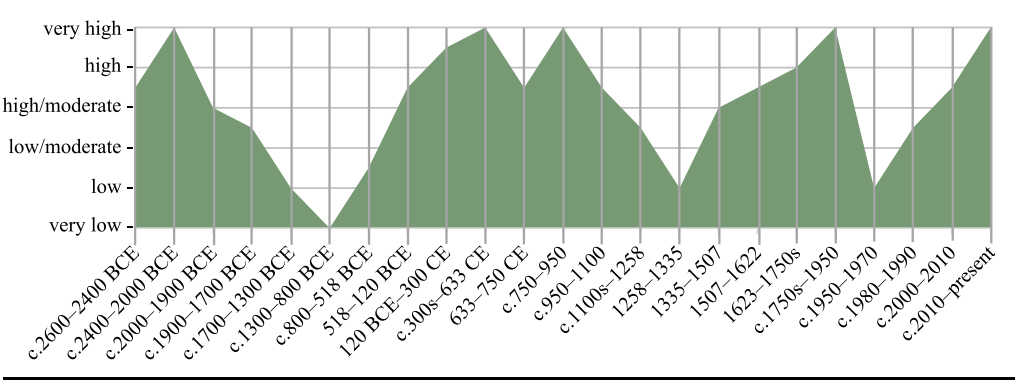
PERIOD (*GULF ERA NAME*)	TRADE INTENSITY	REGIONS INVOLVED	
		PERSIAN GULF	SOUTH ASIA
***c.*2600–2400 BCE** *Early Bronze Age*	high	southern Iran (Elam), Oman/UAE (Magan), Bahrain (Dilmun), south-central Iraq (Mesopotamia: Sumer)	Indus Valley (Harappa, Meluhha): Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Gujarat
***c.*2400–2000 BCE** *Early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age*	very high	southern Iran (Elam), Oman/UAE (Magan), Bahrain (Dilmun), south-central Iraq (Mesopotamia: Akkadian Empire)	Indus Valley (Harappa, Meluhha): Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Gujarat
***c.*2000–1900 BCE** *Middle Bronze Age*	high to moderate	Oman/UAE (Magan), Bahrain (Dilmun), south-central Iraq (Mesopotamia: Babylonia)	Indus Valley (Harappa, Meluhha): Balochistan, Sindh, Gujarat
***c.*1900–1700 BCE** *Middle Bronze Age*	moderate	Oman/UAE (Magan), Bahrain (Dilmun), south-central Iraq (Mesopotamia: Babylonia)	Indus Valley (Harappa, Meluhha): Balochistan, Sindh, Gujarat
***c.*1700–1300 BCE** *Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age*	moderate to low	Oman/UAE (Magan), Bahrain (Dilmun), south-central Iraq (Mesopotamia: Babylonia)	Indus Valley (Harappa, Meluhha): Balochistan, Sindh, Gujarat
***c.*1300–800 BCE** *Early Iron Age, Middle Iron Age*	very low	southern Iran (Elam), Bahrain (Dilmun)	Gujarat
***c.*800–518 BCE** *Late Iron Age*	low to moderate	southern Iran (Elam), Bahrain (Dilmun)	Gujarat
518–120 BCE *Achaemenid, Hellenistic*	high	southern Iran (Persis), south-central Iraq (Mesopotamia)	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast
120 BCE–300 CE *Parthian, Early Sasanian*	high to very high	southern Iran (Persis), south-central Iraq (Mesopotamia)	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast
***c.*300s–633 CE** *Sasanian*	very high	southern Iran (Persis, Siraf), Oman/UAE, southern Iraq (Al-Ubullah/Obolla)	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast, Tamil Nadu
633–750 CE *Islamic Conquest, Umayyad*	high	southern Iran (Persis, Siraf), Oman/UAE, southern Iraq (Al-Ubullah/Obolla)	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast, Tamil Nadu
***c.*750–950** *Early Abbasid*	very high	southern Iran (Siraf), Oman/UAE, Bahrain, south-central Iraq (Basra, Baghdad)	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast, Coromandel coast
***c.*950–1100** *Middle Abbasid, Early Seljuk*	high	southern Iran (Siraf, then Kish), Oman/UAE, Bahrain, south-central Iraq (Basra, Baghdad)	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast, Coromandel coast
***c.*1100s–1258** *Late Abbasid, Late Seljuk, Khwarazmian*	moderate	southern Iran (Kish), Oman/UAE, Bahrain, south-central Iraq (Basra, Baghdad)	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast

(*Continued*)

Table II: Continued.

PERIOD (*GULF ERA NAME*)	TRADE INTENSITY	REGIONS INVOLVED	
		PERSIAN GULF	SOUTH ASIA
1258–1335 Ilkhanid (*Mongol*)	low	southern Iran (Kish, then Hormuz), Oman/UAE, Bahrain	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast
1335–1507 *Post-Ilkhanid, Kingdom of Hormuz, Timurid*	moderate to high	southern Iran (Hormuz), Oman/UAE, Bahrain	Sindh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Malabar coast
1507–1622 *Kingdom of Hormuz, Portuguese, Safavid, Early Ottoman*	moderate to high	whole Persian Gulf region (Hormuz)	Sindh, Kachchh, Gujarat, Punjab, Konkan coast, Goa, Malabar coast, Coromandel coast, Bengal
1623–1750s *Early British, Safavid, Afsharid, Early Ottoman*	high to very high	whole Persian Gulf region	Balochistan, Sindh, Kachchh, Gujarat, Punjab, Bombay (Konkan coast), Malabar coast, Coromandel coast
***c.*1750s–1950** *British, Zand, Qajar, Pahlavi, Late Ottoman*	very high	whole Persian Gulf region	Balochistan, Sindh, Kachchh, Gujarat, Punjab, Bombay (Konkan coast), Malabar coast, Coromandel coast
***c.*1950–1970**	moderate to low	whole Persian Gulf region	Pakistan, India
***c.*1980–1990**	moderate	eastern Arabia (GCC states)	Pakistan, India
***c.*2000–2010**	high	eastern Arabia (GCC states)	Pakistan, India
2010–present	very high	eastern Arabia (GCC states)	Pakistan, India

Table III: Trade intensity through the Indo-Gulf corridor, 2600 BCE–present (chart)



with the challenges caravans faced traversing the difficult terrain between inland towns like Shikarpur and Kerman, where routes are restricted to a handful of mountain passes, and trips are less frequent.[8] This explains the differing levels of Indian influence between the ports and inland towns of the Gulf. The Bandari cuisine of southern Iran, for instance, is famous for its pronounced Indian influence, such as its heavy use of spices, while the Indian influence on Kermani cuisine is far less apparent.

Of course, favourable meteorology and geography were not enough for these shipping and caravan routes to form; there had to be a momentum behind their formation: a demand in each region for what the other has to offer. Along the shores of the Persian Gulf, that demand was created by the barren environment and limited resources of coastal Arabia and Iran, combined with the absence of rivers linking these coasts with their hinterlands, except for the northern head of the Gulf, where the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab and the Rūd-e Kārun connect south-central Iraq (Basra and Baghdad) and southwest Iran (Ahvaz and Shushtar) with the Indian Ocean world. This scarcity created an intense demand for overseas goods, which were easier, cheaper, and faster to import than inland goods. The Gulf's largest source of imports and market for its few exports (pearls, dates, horses) was usually India. During periods of high trade intensity through the Indo-Gulf corridor, the Gulf ports' connection with India was a defining feature of their existence. The maritime trade routes linking them with India and the wider Indian Ocean were lifelines: their very survival depended upon them. Indeed, many of eastern Arabia's port towns were established in the 17th to 18th centuries because of the increased demand in India for Gulf pearls after the arrival of the Portuguese and the British. India was also important for the Red Sea and East African economies, but the Gulf was the most dependant on India, followed by the Red Sea, because of their barren environments and close proximity to India. K.N. Chaudhuri paints the following picture to illustrate India's importance to these regions: "If the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea were the thumb and forefinger of the Arabian Sea, the coast of India was the arm to which the hand was attached."[9]

On the other side of the Arabian Sea there was a similar environmental factor at play. The regions of Balochistan, Sindh, Kachchh (Kutch), Gujarat, and their hinterlands of southwestern Punjab and Rajasthan, are the most arid and semi-arid regions of the Indian subcontinent. This is South Asia's "dry zone", clearly visible on climatic maps of the subcontinent. Despite the dry zone's scarcity of rainfall and limited resources, it was a cradle of commerce: homeland to the largest concentration of merchant communities in South Asia. Today, the majority of India's billionaires come from these same communities: the Bhatias, Lohanas, Khatris, Multanis, Marwaris, Khojas, Memons, Bohras, and Parsis. Claude Markovits argues that the dry zone's constrained conditions motivated its merchants first to import goods from India's more fertile regions, then to export them across the Indian Ocean from the 17th century onwards. Over time, dry zone merchants emerged from controlling the import-export sector of the dry zone to dominating the import-export sector of India and then the Indian Ocean. In the absence of investment opportunities in the dry zone, dry zone merchants invested in other parts of India and the Indian Ocean. As their capital accumulated, so their networks expanded. They connected the Indian Ocean with India's financial markets, providing the credit and capital investment that

[8] The main mountain passes linking India and Iran are (from southwest to northeast): the Khojak, Bolan, Sanghar, Gomal, Peiwar, and Khyber passes. Key studies of the caravan routes and merchants (Multanis and Shikarpuris) connecting India and Iran are: Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750* (1994), chaps. 1–3 and Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550–1900* (2002), chaps. 1, 3.

[9] Ibid., p. 127.

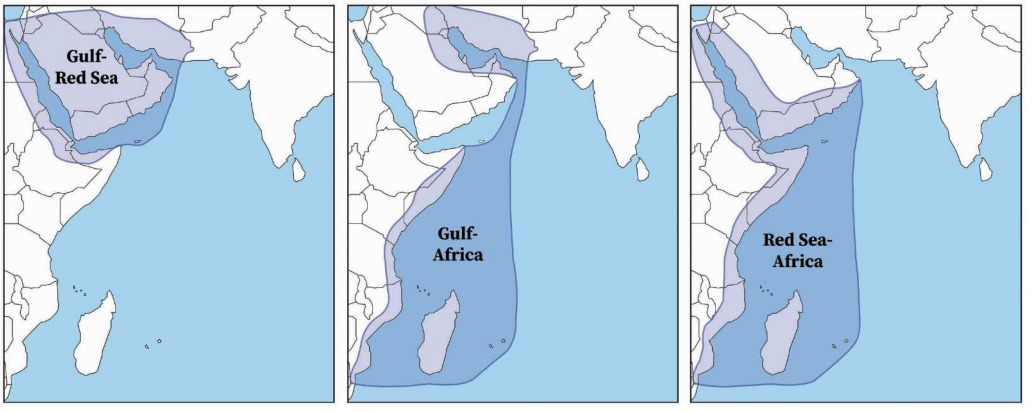


Figure 2: Other transregional corridors in the western Indian Ocean[10]

Table IV: Other transregional corridors in the western Indian Ocean and their socio-economic zones (in order of proximity, far-near-far)

GULF-RED SEA CORRIDOR	GULF-AFRICA CORRIDOR	RED SEA-AFRICA CORRIDOR
Persian Gulf: • Baghdad • Basra • Upper Gulf • Central Gulf • Lower Gulf • Gulf of Oman ***Red Sea:*** • Sharqiya Coast (Oman) • Dhofari Coast (Oman) • Socotra (Yemen) • Gulf of Aden • Lower Red Sea • Central Red Sea • Upper Red Sea • Gulf of Aqaba • Gulf of Suez	***Persian Gulf:*** • Baghdad • Basra • Upper Gulf • Central Gulf • Lower Gulf • Gulf of Oman ***East Africa:*** • Benadir/Somaili Coast • Swahili/Zanj Coast (Kenya, Tanzania) • Sofala Coast (Mozambique) • Comoros • Madagascar • Mauritius & Réunion	***Red Sea:*** • Gulf of Suez • Gulf of Aqaba • Upper Red Sea • Central Red Sea • Lower Red Sea • Gulf of Aden • Socotra (Yemen) • Dhofari Coast (Oman) • Sharqiya Coast (Oman) ***East Africa:*** • Benadir/Somaili Coast • Swahili/Zanj Coast (Kenya, Tanzania) • Sofala Coast (Mozambique) • Comoros • Madagascar • Mauritius & Réunion

these other regions lacked.[11] This is how India became the economic engine of the Indian Ocean in the 18th to mid-20th centuries, enjoying a large trade surplus during this time.[12] For millennia, India often loomed large over the horizon — all trade routes led to it.

[10] Maps designed by James Onley and Adam Noeman, 2024.

[11] Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (2008), pp. 187–219, previously published in Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Subrahmanyam (eds), *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950* (2003), pp. 131–162.

[12] Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company, 1660–1760*, p. 185.

As important as India was for the western Indian Ocean, the other regions had much to offer each other, so they too established long-distance trade networks linking them together, as the Figure 2 maps and Table IV show. These long-distance trade networks were and remain dynamic, fluctuating over time.

3.2 The transregional centres of the western Indian Ocean

Each of the Indian Ocean's four major regions and their subordinate socio-economic zones have centres or hubs (principal ports and towns) servicing a network of nodes (other ports, towns, and areas). These centres and their networks vary by type, according to what they provide, as Table V shows.

The location and number of these centres have changed through the centuries, while other centres remained fixed. Mecca, for instance, has been the principal pilgrimage centre of the Islamic world since the 7th century, whereas the importance of Indian ports trading with the Gulf changed through the centuries. In the 1st to 10th centuries, the principal port was Broach (aka Barygaza, now Bharuch), followed by Cambay (now Khambhat) in the 10th to 16th centuries, then Surat in the 16th to 17th centuries, and finally Bombay (now Mumbai) in the 18th to 20th centuries. Each centre type in Table V and its network of nodes, connected through ancient shipping and caravan routes, form part of the same system or structure binding the regions together. During the British Raj, for instance, India and the Persian Gulf formed part of the same financial system (using the Indian *rupee*), credit system (using the Indian *hundī*), banking system (using India-based banks), postal system (using the Indian Post Office), legal system (using Indian law and courts), political system (belonging to the Indian Empire), awards system (using Indian orders, titles, and medals), and diplomatic system (run by the Indian Political Service), while

Table V: Types of centres and their networks in the western Indian Ocean

CENTRES & NETWORKS	PROVIDES	EXAMPLES
Resource extraction	commodities	pearls, pepper, teak, tea
Production	manufactured goods	ceramics, cotton textiles, woolen shawls, wooden doors, pens, paper, metal, tools
Commercial	a principal market for something, a distribution centre, a transshipment hub	entrepôt ports, market towns
Financial	credit, capital investment, currency	rupees, hundis
Legal	adjudication, contracts	courts, judges, lawyers
Religious	pilgrimage sites, scholars, teachers, education, training	Mecca, Najaf, Dwarka, *'ulamā'* (many roles), gurus, madrassas
Cultural	literature, art, music, fashion, architecture	writers, artists, musicians, designers, artisans, architects
Intellectual	scholarship, education	scholars, teachers, universities
Labour supply	labour	workers, craftsmen, specialists
Governance & regulation	governance, regulation, treaty & law enforcement, protection, courts, postal service, currency control	political capitals

Bombay was the centre of the Gulf Arab printing and music-recording industries, as well as the commercial centre for Gulf exports. These connections are reinforced on a daily basis by the long-term presence of diaspora communities from the other regions, such as merchants, the members of which serve as cross-cultural brokers for their host society.[13] This integration of the two regions into the same networks, systems, and structures, combined with the physical presence of diaspora communities, created a shared public sphere where communities and cultures from India and the Gulf interacted, influenced each other, and combined. The connections between the two regions were so strong that, on fifteen occasions between the 6th century BCE and the 20th century CE, parts of India and the Gulf were politically unified under a single empire — the topic of section 8 below.

3.3 The monsoon winds

The ancient interconnectedness between India and the Persian Gulf is best illustrated by the way in which their ecologies and economies were intertwined by the monsoon — a word inextricably associated with India and the Indian Ocean, but which comes from the Persian Gulf, from *mawsim* (موسم), meaning "season" in both Arabic and Persian. Ships have used the monsoon winds to sail across the Arabian Sea between India and the Persian Gulf since *c.*2600 BCE.[14] For four and a half thousand years, ship voyages were governed by the Indian Ocean's rainy southwest monsoon (*rīḥ al-kaws*) and its dry northeast monsoon (*rīḥ al-azyab*), until steamships eventually replaced sailing ships during the 1860s to 1950s. Gulf dhows heading to India had two sailing seasons during the era of sail: the start of the southwest monsoon (*awwal al-kaws*) during mid-March to mid-May and the end of the southwest monsoon (*akhir al-kaws*) during mid-August to late September/early October. India's ports were closed to shipping during the height of the southwest monsoon (late May to mid-August) due to the heavy rains and strong winds in India. The entire northeast monsoon from early October to mid-March was good for westbound dhows sailing from India to the Persian Gulf.[15] See the map in Figure 3.

The renowned Indian Ocean mariner and historian, Alan Villiers, describes the monsoon sailing seasons in this way:

> The usual sailing season on the west coast of India is regarded as lasing from Coconut Day — about the beginning or middle of August — until mid-May or mid-June, depending on the local habits of the south-west monsoon in their own home-ports. These habits are well known. [An] early start means that troublesome voyages may have to be made, but the assumption is that, by that time, the south-west monsoon is well established in the interior of India and conditions have settled

[13] The concept of "cross-cultural brokers" was first introduced by Philip Curtin in *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (1984), pp. 2, 11.

[14] Archaeological evidence suggests that trade contacts between the Indus Valley and the Gulf were established as early as 2600 BCE. See: Edens, "Indus-Arabian Interaction during the Bronze Age: A Review of Evidence", in Possehl (ed.), *Harappan Civilization*, 2nd edn (1993), pp. 335–363; Laursen and Steinkeller, *Babylonia, the Gulf Region, and the Indus: Archaeological and Textual Evidence for Contact in the Third and Early Second Millennium B.C.* (2017), pp. ix, 1, 3, 6–7, 17, 19–23, 26–27, 31–32, 34–40, 49–51, 56–60, 68–70, 79–84, 92, 106.

[15] Lunde, "Sailing Times in Sulaymān al-Mahrī" and "Appendix 2: Sulaymān al-Mahrī's Sailing Times according to the Yazdagird Calendar for the Year AD 1511", in ed. Constable and Facey (eds), *The Principles of Arab Navigation* (2013), pp. 75–82, 119–126; Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (1989), pp. 256–257; Sheriff, *Dhow Culture of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (2010), chap. 2 (part 3), chap. 7 (part 3); Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean* 1: *From the Fourth Millennium BCE to the Sixth Century CE* (2019), pp. 9–13.

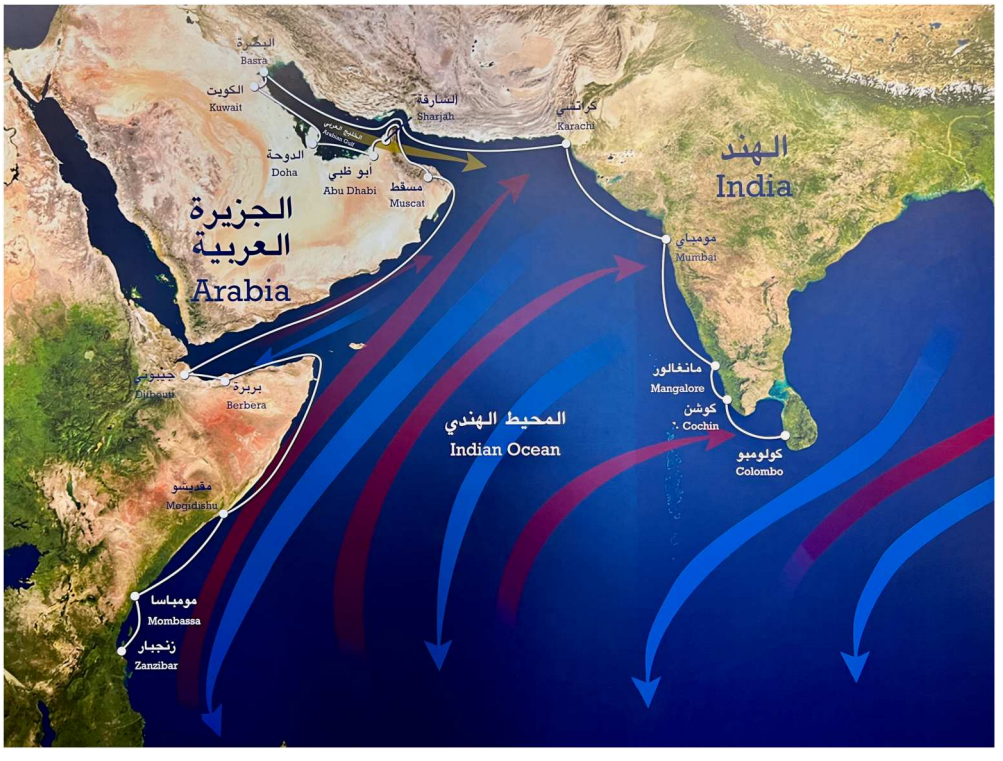


Figure 3: Trade winds of the western Indian Ocean: the southwest monsoon = red upward arrows; the northwest monsoon = blue downward arrows; the shimal = yellow rightwards arrow. White lines show the coastal sailing routes.[16]

> down. In November, there can be sudden spells of bad weather in which the coasters [those sailing along the coast] are all too frequently caught out, but from then until March the north-east monsoon brings fair conditions. Ships [from] Malabar and South Indian ports must be home, and out of harm's way, before mid-May. Karachi ships can take a chance on another month, but the ships of Kathiawar [peninsula in Gujarat] try to be home at the latest by the first week in June. As on the Arab coast, ships go to their own home ports during the bad season. This is essential to allow the necessary refit to be carried on under their owner's eye and to recuperate the crews in their own homes. The Malabar ships do not usually begin to sail much before November. They allow about one hundred days for a Persian Gulf voyage and twice that for a round [trip] voyage to East Africa. No Indian leaves his home waters for Arabian ports before November or after March, but Arabs sail from India as late as the end of April, as they do not have to return to lay up.[17]

Dhows followed one of two routes across the Indian Ocean: the safe coastal route, staying within sight of the Arabian Sea's northern shore, and the riskier direct route, sailing directly across the Arabian Sea. With a favourable wind, a dhow sailing from Muscat to Bombay could take about two weeks, while the journey from Kuwait to Bombay could take three to

[16] "Trade Winds" wall map, Sharjah Maritime Museum, UAE (photo by James Onley, 2023).
[17] Villiers, *The Indian Ocean* (1952), pp. 98–99.

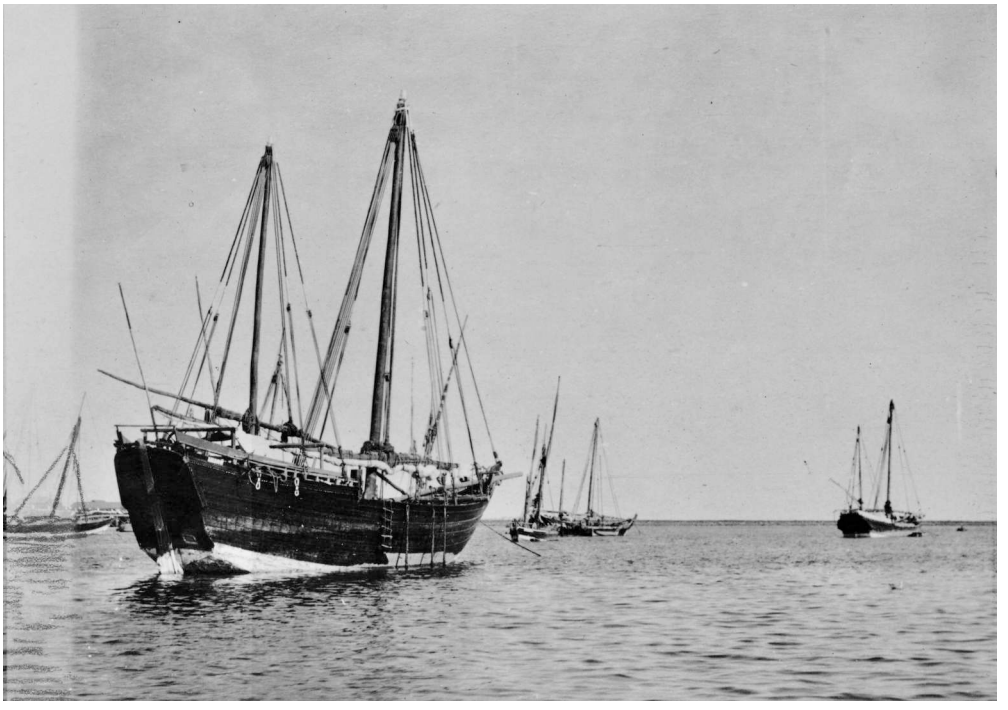


Figure 4: Some of the thousands of Gulf dhows that sailed annually to the Indian subcontinent. The dhow in the foreground is a *ghanja*, anchored off Karachi, 1916.[18]

four weeks. Without a favourable wind, sailing times could easily double. Sailing times also varied by ship size and type (see Figure 4).[19]

The sailing season of mid-August to mid-May conveniently dovetailed with the pearling and date harvest seasons of May to mid-September, when India's ports were closed to shipping. The sailing, pearling and date harvest seasons were economically interconnected in several ways. First, pearls and dates were eastern Arabia's main exports to India, and the bulk of the region's imports from India were purchased with the resulting profits. Second, at the end of the pearling season, pearling dhow crewmen with the necessary skills joined the crews of cargo dhows engaged in the India trade. Third, at the start of the pearling season, some cargo dhows returning from India were redeployed as pearling vessels (see Table VI).[20]

In 1862, the British India Steam Navigation Company (known as BI) introduced a regular Bombay/Gulf Service, shortening the sailing time between Bombay and Basra from several weeks to just seven days and strengthening the links between India and the region. BI started the service with a voyage every six weeks, which it increased to every two weeks in 1866, then to every week in 1874, and finally to two weekly voyages in 1903: a "fast" one-week service that called at fewer ports, and a "slow" two-week service that called at more. From

[18] "Arab Dhow, Karachi, December 1916", Rev. Edwin Aubrey Storrs-Fox, *Album of Tour of the Persian Gulf*, British Library: Photo 496/6/2.

[19] Lunde, "Sailing Times in Sulaymān al-Mahrī" and "Appendix 2: Sulaymān al-Mahrī's Sailing Times according to the Yazdagird Calendar for the Year AD 1511" (2013).

[20] For more about Gulf seafaring, see the works by Agius, Hourani, and Yajima listed in section 2 of the Bibliography.

Table VI: Synchronized seasons: Indo-Gulf trade and the Gulf's pearling and date industries[21]

SAILING SEASON	PEARLING SEASON	DATE HARVEST SEASON
INDIA ➔ GULF ➔ RETURN		
out: October to mid-March	**No pearl diving**	**No date harvesting**
back: mid-March to mid-May	October to April	October to April
No sailing	**Pearl diving**	**Date harvesting**
Indian ports closed	May to mid-September	May to mid-September
GULF ➔ INDIA ➔ RETURN		
out: mid-August to late Sept	**No pearl diving**	**No date harvesting**
back: October to mid-March	October to April	October to April

the 1950s onwards, eastern Arabia's rapid economic development, fuelled by new oil revenue, necessitated larger shipments from farther afield, particularly Europe and America, later East Asia, which led to a decline in the Gulf's economic dependence on the Indian subcontinent. This decline was symbolized by the disappearance of BI in 1972 when it was absorbed into P&O, and by the eventual cancellation of the Bombay/Gulf Service, which had continued under the P&O banner until 1982.[22]

3.4 The symbolism of Sindbad the Sailor

The ancient maritime connections between the Persian Gulf and India are most famously symbolized by the stories of Sindbad the Sailor (Arabic: *al-Sindibād*, السندباد, alternatively *al-Hindibād*, الهندباد) associated with the *One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Arab and Persian folktales dating from the Abbasid Empire (750–1258). Sindbad is a fictional Arab merchant of Baghdad, the Abbasid capital, who sailed from Basra to India and the wider Indian Ocean during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn Al-Rashīd (r.786–809). In his first voyage, Sindbad describes a visit to India thus:

> One day I went in to see King Mihrajan [Maharaja] and found with him a group of Indians. I saluted them and they returned my salutation, welcomed me, and asked me about my country. Then I asked them about theirs, and they told me that they consisted of various races. One is called *Kshatriyas*, who are the noblest of their races and who oppress no one, nor inflict violence on anyone. Another is called the *Brahmans*, who abstain from wine but live in joy, sport, merriment, and

[21] Sailing times varied from port to port. This generalised table uses the sailing times listed in Lunde, "Sailing Times in Sulaymān al-Mahrī" and "Appendix 2: Sulaymān al-Mahrī's Sailing Times according to the Yazdagird Calendar for the Year AD 1511" (2013). Other sailing tables can be found in Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, pp. 256–257, and Agius, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: The People of the Dhow* (2005), pp. 195–197, listed in section 2 of the Bibliography. For more about the sailing, pearling, and date harvest seasons, see the works by Burdett, Tibbetts, and Villiers in section 1.3 of the Bibliography and those by Abu-Lughod, Agius, Carter, Constable and Facey, Ḥabrah, Hourani, Lunde, Potts, Segal, Sheriff, and Yajima in section 2.

[22] For more about BI, see: Jones, "British Indian Steamers and the Trade of the Persian Gulf, 1862–1914", *The Great Circle: Journal of the Australian Association for Maritime History* 7.1 (April 1985), pp. 23–44; Jones, "The Management of British India Steamers in the Gulf 1862–1945: Gray MacKenzie and the Mesopotamia Persia Corporation", in Lawless (ed.), *The Gulf in the Early 20th Century: Foreign Institutions and Local Responses* (1986), pp. 25–63; Morton, "The British India Line in the Arabian Gulf", *Liwa*: *Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research* 5.10 (December 2013), pp. 40–63.

prosperity, possessing horses, camels, and cattle. They told me, moreover, that the Indians consist of seventy-two castes, and I marveled at that.[23]

Figure 5: Sindbad the Sailor.[24]

In Persian, *Sindbād* (سندباد) means the "wind of Sindh". Sindh is the region of the Indian subcontinent closest to the Gulf, as well as the Indian name for the Arabian Sea before the Arab conquest of Sindh in 711–712: the *Sindhu Sagar*, meaning the Sindhi Sea. Sindbad, therefore, may have been a nickname referring to the winds that carried Gulf dhows to and from India for millennia (see Figure 5). The Sindbad stories originated from medieval sailors' travel accounts like those collected by Buzurg bin Shahriyār Al-Rāmhormuzī (d.1009), a famous Persian ship's captain (*nākhudā*), in his *Book of Wonders of India* (*Kitāb ʿAjāʾib al-Hind*), compiled in the 10th century.[25] In 1980–81, the British explorer, Tim Severin, famously re-enacted these accounts by sailing a replica of a medieval dhow, the 26.5-metre *Sohar*, from Oman to India, and then China — a journey of 9,600 km lasting eight months, which he immortalized in his 1982 book, *The Sindbad Voyage*.[26] A second re-enactment was made in 2010, when Captain Saleh Al-Jabri of the Royal Navy of Oman sailed another replica of a medieval dhow, the 17-metre *Jewel of Muscat*, from Oman to India and then Singapore — a journey of 3,800 km lasting four and a half months.[27]

3.5 The longue durée of Indo-Gulf commercial connections

During the periods of peak Indo-Gulf trade intensity between the 24th century BCE and the mid-20th century CE (as shown in Tables II–III), the Persian Gulf's maritime merchants often

[23] Anon., *Sindbad and Other Stories from the Arabian Nights*, trans. Haddawy (1995), p. 10.

[24] "Sindbad the Sailor", colour lithograph, 1932, by Ivan Yakovlevich Bilibin, series of murals depicting scenes from *The Arabian Nights* (1931–32), Sotheby's, New York.

[25] See: Al-Ramhormuzi, *The Book of the Wonders of India: Mainland, Sea and Islands*, ed. Freeman-Grenville (1981); Freeman-Grenville, "Some Thoughts on Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar Al-Ramhormuzi: *The Book of the Wonders of India*", *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 28 (1982), pp. 63–70; Shafiq, *Seafarers of the Seven Seas: The Maritime Culture in the* Kitāb ʿAjāʾib al-Hind *(The Book of the Marvels of India) by Buzurg Ibn Shahriyār (d. 399/1009)* (2020).

[26] Severin, *The Sindbad Voyage* (1982).

[27] Omani government, *Jewel of Muscat* website, https://jewelofmuscat.tv; Vosmer, "The Jewel of Muscat: Reconstructing a Ninth-Century Sewn-Plank Boat", in Effeny (ed.), *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds Book* (2010), pp. 120–135.

Table VII: Eastern Arabia's trade with India (as a % of overall trade), 1904[28]

EXPORTS TO INDIA		IMPORTS FROM INDIA	
Bahrain & Qatar	75.3%	Bahrain & Qatar	59.7%
Muscat	74.0%	Muscat	57.2%
Trucial States	71.3%	Trucial States	55.0%
Kuwait	34.8%	Kuwait	49.4%

regarded South Asian ports as closer in terms of travel time and more important economically than any West Asian city. For them, it was Bombay they knew, not Beirut; Calicut, not Cairo; Surat, not Suez. Before the advent of modern air travel in the mid-20th century, therefore, the port towns of the Gulf belonged more to the Indian Ocean world than to the Mediterranean Middle East. Consider, for instance, a sample survey from 1904 of eastern Arabian trade with India, during one of the eras of very high trade intensity (see Table VII).

As explained above, the Indian subcontinent's maritime trade links with the Gulf region extend back to the mid-3rd millennium BCE. Archaeological digs in the modern-day Gulf region have uncovered a wide range of artefacts from the Indus Valley Civilization (known as Harappa in South Asia and as Meluhha in the Gulf) from *c*.2600 to 1900 BCE that show close commercial connections with Balochistan, Sindh, the Punjab, Kachchh, and Gujarat. There is also clear evidence of Indus Valley influence on Gulf material culture. For instance, merchants in Dilmun (as ancient Bahrain was known in the 3rd–1st millennia BCE) used the Indus Valley weight system, with its unique units of measurement, instead of the Mesopotamian weight system — indicating the extent of Dilmun's trade with India.[29]

Before the Arab conquest of Sindh in 711–12, commercial ties between the Gulf and India were close, but, during the early Abbasid era (750–950), the two regions became an integrated trading zone. The importance of India for the Persian Gulf was reflected in the common Arabic term for the coastlines between Sindh and the head of the Gulf during the Sasanid, Umayyad, and early Abbasid eras from the 3rd to 8th centuries: the *Arḍ al-Hind* (the Land of India). During the same time, India's trade links with Al-Ubullah, then Iraq's oldest port, were so strong that it was known as the *Farj al-Hind* (the Frontier of India). Similarly, Bushehr in southern Iran was known as the *Darvaze-ye Hind* (the Gateway of India) during its heyday in the mid-18th to early 20th centuries. These names were a reflection of the Gulf ports' strong trade ties with India and the sizeable Indian communities of merchants and tradesmen residing at these ports.

Because of the shortage of almost everything in eastern Arabia and southern Iran, almost everything had to be imported. The largest source of imports and market for exports was often India. The main ports and towns in India that merchants in the Gulf traded with varied

[28] Compiled from the multiple trade reports in Government of India, *Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the Years 1904–1905* (1906). Most of Qatar's trade with India was indirect through Bahrain at this time, hence the combined listing. The Government of India's trade reports on the Gulf for 1873–1904 are contained in its annual *Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency*, republished by Archive Editions in 1986. Also see: "Review of the Persian Gulf Trade Reports from 1873 to 1905", in Saldanha (ed.), *Précis on Commerce and Communications in the Persian Gulf, 1801–1905* (1906), pp. 54–56. For its reports from 1905–40, see: Tuson (ed.), *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports, 1905–1940* (1987).

[29] Laursen and Steinkeller, *Babylonia, the Gulf Region, and the Indus*, pp. 1, 3, 6–7, 18–19, 20, 23, 26–27, 32, 34–35, 37, 39–40, 48, 49–50, 56–58, 65, 68–70, 79–88, 90–91.

Table VIII: Principal ports and towns of the Indian subcontinent trading with the Persian Gulf

REGION	PORT / TOWN	PERIOD
Balochistan	Sutkagen Dor	26th–20th centuries BCE
	Gwadar	18th–20th centuries CE
	Pasni	18th–19th centuries
	Sokhta Koh	25th–20th centuries BCE
	Ormara	18th–19th centuries CE
	Balakot	25th–20th centuries BCE
	Quetta	18th–20th centuries CE
Sindh	Karachi	18th–20th centuries
	Lahori Bandar	13th–19th centuries
	Thatta	14th–18th centuries
	Debal	1st century BCE–13th century CE
	Hyderabad	18th–20th centuries
	Chandu-Daro	26th–20th centuries BCE
	Mohenjo-Daro	26th–20th centuries BCE
	Shikarpur	18th–20th centuries CE
Punjab	Multan	8th century BCE–19th century CE
	Lahore	1st–20th centuries
Kachchh (Kutch)	Lakhpat	18th century–1819
	Jakhau	17th–19th centuries
	Mandvi	16th–20th centuries
	Mundra	17th–20th centuries
	Bhuj	17th–20th centuries
	Anjar	16th–20th centuries
	Tuna Port	18th century–1930s
	Kandla Port	1930s–present
	Dholavira	26th–20th centuries BCE
Gujarat	Kuntasi	25th–20th centuries BCE
	Jamnagar	16th–20th centuries CE
	Porbandar	10th–20th centuries
	Prabhas Patan	20th–13th centuries BCE
	Diu	16th–17th centuries CE
	Gogha	5th–19th centuries
	Bhavnagar	18th–19th centuries
	Rangpur	20th–13th centuries BCE
	Lothal	25th–20th centuries BCE
	Cambay	10th–16th centuries CE
	now: Khambhat	
	Baroda	10th–20th centuries
	now: Vadodara	
	Broach (Barygaza)	1st–19th centuries
	now: Bharuch	
	Surat	16th–17th centuries
Konkan Coast	Damão	16th–17th centuries
	now: Daman	
	Bassein	16th–18th centuries
	now: Vasai	
	Bombay	16th–20th centuries
	now: Mumbai	
	Chaul	1st–17th centuries

(*Continued*)

Table VIII: Continued.

REGION	PORT / TOWN	PERIOD
	Dabhol or Dabul	15th–17th centuries
	Goa	22nd century BCE–17th cent. CE
	Mangalore	1st–20th centuries
Malabar Coast (Kerala)	Cannanore *now:* Kannur	12th–20th centuries
	Calicut *now:* Kozhikode	14th–20th centuries
	Muziris (near Kodungallur) *now:* Pattanam	4th BCE–14th CE centuries
	Cochin *now:* Kochi	14th–20th centuries
	Kollam / Quilon	1st–20th centuries
Coromandel Coast	Masulipatnam *now:* Machilipatnam	17th–18th centuries
	Madras *now:* Chennai	18th–20 centuries
Bengal	Calcutta *now:* Kolkata	18th–20 centuries

over the centuries, as Table VIII above shows. Most of the goods imported by Gulf ports — like wood, metal, cloth, rice, coffee, tea, sugar, ghee, and spices — were shipped from the ports in this table. The Gulf's few profitable exports were pearls, horses and dates. Pearls were the backbone of the economy for Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States (now the United Arab Emirates) until the collapse of the pearling industry in the 1930s. They were bought by Indian, Arab, and Persian pearl merchants and taken to Bombay, the capital of the Indian Ocean pearl market in the 18th to 20th centuries.

The end of Britain's Indian Empire in 1947 and dawn of the oil era in the following decades contributed to eastern Arabia's reorientation away from the Indian subcontinent towards the Arab world and the West. The Gulf's historical dependency on India greatly declined during this time, symbolized by the abandonment of the Indian rupee in favour of new national currencies in the 1960s (discussed below) and the disappearance of the British India Steam Navigation Company in 1972. In the meantime, two generations of Gulf Arabs grew up without knowing India or Pakistan, and the memory of the Gulf's heavy dependency on the Indian subcontinent faded.

In the early 2000s, however, the GCC states, seeking to counterbalance their dependency on the West, adopted a "Look East" policy to seek new markets, investment opportunities and security partnerships in Asia, especially India and China.[30] This policy led to a dramatic increase in GCC-India trade in the follow years, as the charts in Tables IX–X show.

The GCC states' "Look East" policy has restored Indo-Gulf connections to the historic levels of intensity last seen in the 1940s, but the tables have turned: now the GCC states are *India's* largest regional-bloc trading partner, surpassing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and

[30] For the most recent study of the GCC states' "Look East" policy, see: Janardhan (ed.), *The Arab Gulf's Pivot to Asia: From Transactional to Strategic Partnerships* (2020). Chapters 1, 5, and 8 concern India.

Table IX: India-GCC trade (imports/exports) in $ billions[31]

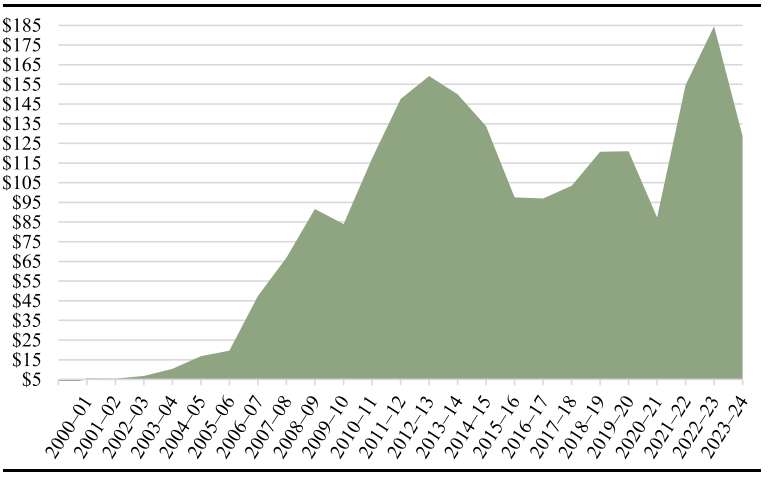
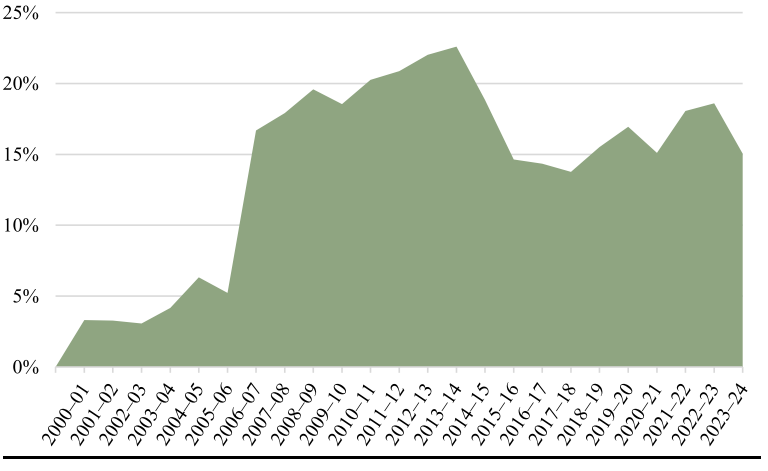


Table X: India-GCC trade (imports/exports) as a % of India's total trade[32]



the European Union (EU). In 2022–23, for instance, India-GCC trade amounted to over $184 billion, outpacing India-EU trade ($135 billion) and India-ASEAN trade ($131 billion) that year. In 2023, the GCC states provided India with 25% of its oil and 60% of its liquid natural gas.

The GCC states are also home to almost nine million Indians and over four million Pakistanis, the largest concentrations of Indian and Pakistani expats in the world, who are also India and Pakistan's single largest source of remittances. In 2017, for instance, they sent over $38 billion to India and almost $14 billion to Pakistan, accounting for 55% of remittances to India and 69% to Pakistan that year.[33]

[31] Compiled from Government of India, Commerce and Industry, Department of Commerce, *Export Import Data Bank (EIDB)*, "Region-Wise All Commodities" databases, https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/default.asp.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Pew Research Center, "Remittance Flows Worldwide in 2017", 3 April 2019, www.pewresearch.org.

3.6 Gulf exports to India before oil

Before oil, the gravitational pull of the India's massive economy locked the Persian Gulf in its orbit during many periods in the long history of the Indo-Gulf corridor. India was the main market for the Gulf's pearl and date industries, as well as the main source of capital for merchants in the lower and central Gulf.

Consider India's importance of for the Gulf's pearling industry. Some of the Gulf's wealthiest pearl merchants (*ṭūwawīsh*), who bought most of the pearls, came from India, usually Sindh, Kachchh, and Gujarat. Most of the tools of trade used by Indian, Arab, and Persian pearl merchants — such as the pearl merchant's chest (*bishtakhta*), sorting sieves, scales, and weights — were made in India. Take the weights, for example: Gulf merchants have used Indian weights for pearls and other commodities for over four millennia. Merchants in Dilmun (ancient Bahrain) used the Indus Valley weight system instead of the Mesopotamian weight system, indicating the extent of Dilmun's trade with the Indus Valley. In the 19th and 20th centuries, two of the most common weight standards were the Bombay *mithqāl* and the Poona *mithqāl*, which were made of polished agate (*ʿaqīq*). Most pearling expeditions — from a single dhow to an entire fleet — were financed by Indian merchant bankers (*ṣarrāfīn*, singular *ṣarrāf*), often Hindu merchants known as *Banians*, who loaned money to the expedition owners or advanced them credit. The Indian *ṣarrāfīn* connected the Gulf with India's financial centres and, as a result, dominated the banking and credit market in the lower and central Gulf. All the pearls harvested in the Gulf were bought by Indian, Arab, or Persian pearl merchants and taken to Bombay (in the 18th to 20th centuries), where they were sold on the Indian pearl market. Gulf pearls were in high demand in India, since they were considered superior to South Indian pearls, which turn pale when touched by perfume or ointment. From India, many Gulf pearls made their way onto the global pearl market, ending up as far away as Europe and America.[34]

India's importance for the Gulf's second industry, dates, was equally significant. As with pearls, India was the principal export market — mainly Karachi and Bombay since the 18th century, where they are still used for weddings and festivals. While the Gulf states now export dates all over the world, India is still a major market. Demand is the highest during Ramadan because Gulf dates are the preferred fruit of choice for Indian Muslims to break their fast with after sunset. Like the pearling industry, the date industry was also heavily dependent on Indian finance before oil.

The Gulf's heavy dependence on India as an export market for its dates and pearls is well illustrated by this 1947 telegram from Britain's senior political representative in the Gulf:

> [The] Sheikh of Bahrein has appealed to me in the strongest terms to get the embargo removed. It seriously disrupts [the] economy in Bahrein and Trucial Coast [the present-day UAE]. According to [the] Sheikh, Bombay is at present [the] sole market where pearls can be properly processed, graded, etc. and, for many classes of pearls, there is no market outside India. Has it been possible to take any action vis-à-vis the Government of India?
>
> What is more serious is that Government of India are reported to have prohibited [the] import of dates. 90% of Batinah crops [from northern Oman] are dry dates of a variety used almost exclusively for weddings and festivals in India. Bahrain has oil to support its finances, but

[34] For more about the pearling industry in the Gulf, see: Carter, *Sea of Pearls: Arabia, Persia, and the Industry that Shaped the Gulf* (2012); Carter, "The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48.2 (2005), pp. 139–209; Ḥabrah, *Mawsūʿat al-ghawṣ wa-al-luʾluʾ fī mujtamaʿ al-Imārāt wa-al-Khalīj al-ʿArabī qabla al-nafṭ* (2004–05); Burdett (ed.), *Records of the Persian Gulf Pearl Fisheries 1857–1962* (1995).

> Muscat depends practically entirely on [the] export of dates to finance imports of general merchandise from India. Closing [the] India dry date market will bring ruin to [the] Batinah [Coast of Oman].[35]

The largest centres of date production in the Persian Gulf were the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab region of southern Iraq centred around Basra, and the Bāṭinah Coast of Oman. Smaller centres included, in descending order: the oases of al-Qaṭīf and al-Aḥsāʾ (al-Ḥasāʾ) in what is now the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, the island of Bahrain, and various oases in the Trucial States (al-ʿAin and al-Līwāʾ being the largest). The rulers of Kuwait owned large date orchards in the al-Faw peninsula just across the border in Iraq, while Qatar had barely any date orchards and was a date importer, not exporter.[36]

4 Indian finance and currency in the Gulf

During many periods over the past 4,600 years, India's economic might dominated the Indian Ocean. As a result, the Indian *rupee* was as widely accepted throughout the region in the 19th and 20th centuries as the US dollar is today, while their economies were underpinned by Indian finance.

The Gulf's big merchants, who engaged in large-scale business endeavours — from pearling expeditions and large date plantations to wholesale imports from India — required capital in amounts that were not available locally. In the absence of local loans, merchants from the lower and central Gulf relied on the Indian credit and moneylending market, based on an Indian bill of exchange and promissory note called the *hundi*, which became popular in the 18th century. This market was run by merchant bankers (*ṣarrāfīn*, singular *ṣarrāf*), almost always Hindu merchants known as *Banians*, who advanced credit or loaned money to Gulf merchants. Indian *sarrafin* connected the Gulf with India's financial centres and, as a result, dominated the credit and moneylending market in the lower and central Gulf. Arab and Persian debtors typically used property as security, and those unable to repay their Indian creditors lost their land — a common occurrence due to the high rates of interest. This is how Indians became one of the largest landholding groups in some Gulf ports, especially in Oman. The dominance of Indian *sarrafin* declined after the establishment of India-based British banks in eastern Arabia in the 1920s to 1940s, however, which gradually reoriented the Gulf towards British finance, although these banks also relied on Indian finance.[37]

One consequence of the Gulf's financial dependence on India was the prevalence of the Indian rupee. From the late 19th century to the 1960s, the rupee was the dominant, and later official, currency of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial States and parts of Oman. The rupee and its denominations (the *pice* and *anna*) originally featured the bust of the empress or emperor of the Indian Empire, which encompassed parts of coastal Arabia: Bahrain (1880–1947), the Trucial States

[35] Telegram, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 14 October 1947, in "Muscat: Date Trade: Indian Tariff on Muscat Dates, 1931–1947", IOR/L/PS/12/2965, folio 4, British Library, available on the Qatar Digital Library, www.QDL.qa

[36] For more about the date industry, see: Potts, *Feast of Dates* (2002); Segal, "Rulers and Merchants in Pre-Oil Kuwait: The Significance of Palm Dates", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41.2 (2014), pp. 167–182.

[37] For more on the Indian credit and moneylending market in the Indian Ocean, see: Martin, "Hundi/Hawala: The Problem of Definition", *Modern Asian Studies* 43.4 (July 2009), pp. 909–937; Prakash, "Sarrafs, Financial Intermediation and Credit Network in Mughal India", in Van Cauwenbergh (ed.), *Money, Coins and Commerce: Essays in the Monetary History of Asia and Europe (from Antiquity to Modern Times)* (1991), pp. 473–490; Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780–1950* (2017).

(1892–1947), Kuwait (1899–1947), Qatar (1916–47), and unofficially Oman (1891–1947). After India became a republic in 1950, the coins featured the national emblem of India: the Lion Capital of Ashoka. India introduced a special paper Gulf rupee in 1959, which differed from the Indian rupee in colour (red) and serial number prefix (a Z). Kuwait adopted its own currency, the *dinar* (دينار), in 1961; followed by Bahrain, also the dinar, in 1965; then Qatar and Dubai launched the Qatar-Dubai *riyal* (ريال) in 1966. The remaining Trucial States briefly adopted the Saudi riyal in 1966, then Qatar-Dubai riyal, except for Abu Dhabi, which adopted the Bahraini dinar. Oman was the next to adopt its own currency, in 1970: the riyal, which is sub-divided into 1,000 *baisas* (بيسة singular) — being the Arabic equivalent of *paisas*, 1/100 of a rupee (introduced by India after the decimalisation of the rupee in 1957). The newly-formed federation of the United Arab Emirates was the last to adopt its own currency, in 1973: the *dirham* (درهم), after which the Qatar-Dubai riyal became the Qatari riyal. Today, the 1 riyal coin of Qatar, 1 dirham coin of the Emirates, 100 *fil* coin (1/10 of a dinar) of Kuwait and Bahrain, and 100 baisa coin (1/10 of a riyal) of Oman are still known as the *rubiyya* (روبية, rupee) by the older generation, reflecting their similar size and look to the rupee as well as the original rate of conversion: 1 rupee = 1 Qatari riyal, 1 Emirati dirham, 1/10 of a Kuwaiti dinar, 1/10 of a Bahraini dinar, and 1/10 of an Omani riyal (see Figures 6–7).[38] The parity of these currencies with the Indian rupee at the time of their establishment and their subsequent pegging to the US dollar, except for Kuwait, means that their fixed exchange rate with the US dollar today is a legacy of the Gulf rupee.[39]

Figure 6: Indian rupee, 1940 (George VI, Emperor of India).[40]

Figure 7: UAE dirham, 1973 (the *rubiyya*)

[38] For more about Indian rupees in the Gulf and wider Indian Ocean, see: Darley-Doran and the Central Bank of Bahrain, *History of Currency in the State of Bahrain* (1996); Bhandare, "Money on the Move: The Rupee and the Indian Ocean Region", in Ray and Alpers (eds), *Cross Currents and Community Networks*: *The History of the Indian Ocean World* (2007), pp. 206–244.

[39] The similar parity of the Saudi riyal with the Qatari riyal and Emirati dirham is because of its current pegging to the US dollar and previous pegging to the British pound at a similar rate to the Indian rupee, which was pegged at £1 = Rs.15 during 1862–1966.

[40] AKS.9955 @ Wikipedia.

5 The influence of Indian imports on Gulf material culture

The strong commercial connections between India and the Persian Gulf over millennia naturally led to a strong Indian influence, clearly evident in the material culture of eastern Arabia and southern Iran, from architecture and accoutrements to clothing and cuisine. Gulf Arab dhows were built with teak imported from India. The houses of Arab and Persian elites in towns like Manama, Dubai, Bushehr, and Lengeh were decorated with Indian doors and furniture. Kashmiri shawls still adorn the heads of many Gulf Arabs, especially in winter. Colourful Indo-Persian turbans were worn by certain Gulf Arab groups. Gulf Arabs ate (and still eat) their lamb and fish with curry and rice from India every day. In these and countless other ways, the Gulf's ports and people were deeply connected to the world of India, while an Indian world (in the form of communities) existed among them.

One of Persian Gulf region's greatest restrictions was the lack of wood for building material, especially dhows, since most of what makes life possible in eastern Arabia and southern Iran had to be imported from overseas. The best building material for dhows was Indian teak from the Malabar Coast (the coast of the state of Kerala) in western India. Alan Villiers explains how:

> India … was the source of the best of all shipbuilding timbers, Malabar teak. It was [also] the home of the coconut, which provided cordage. It was the home of flax and cotton, which provided sails. It had metals for fastenings.[41]

This is why shipwrights in eastern Arabia and southern Iran imported everything, including their carpentry tools, from India, while the largest dhows, requiring plank sizes and amounts that were sometimes impractical to import, were built on commission by Indian craftsmen under the supervision of Gulf Arab shipwrights in boatyards on the Malabar Coast at ports like Calicut. Alan Villiers tells the story of one such ship, a *boom* of some 500 tons called *The Light of the Earth*, built at or near Calicut in the 1910s:

> She carried a crew of eighty and her main halyards were made from coir rope with nineteen strands. She was built by two famous Kuwaiti master-shipwrights, Mohamed Thwaini and Salim bin Rashid, with more than a hundred Indians to assist them, and she was reputed to have cost one hundred and twenty thousand Indian rupees. She took six months to build. The underlying idea was to save the freight on the timber to Kuwait. While they were about it, they built as large a ship as they could to save as much freight as possible.[42]

Indeed, K.N. Chaudhuri believes that

> It is possible that the conventional cargo-ship of the western Indian Ocean, known as the Arab *boom* or the Indian *dhangi*, was originally designed and built in the shipyards of the Malabar, Konkan, and Gujarat[i coasts]. Throughout the Indian Ocean a thriving trade went on in the sale of newly built ships. Once the Muslim carpenters had studied the constructional features of the Indian-built crafts through repair work and the seasonal careening of the hull, it was an easy matter for them to build directly with imported timber.[43]

---

[41] Villiers, *The Indian Ocean*, p. 93.

[42] Ibid., pp. 86–87. Alan Villiers provides more details of the ship in *Sons of Sindbad: An Account of Sailing with the Arabs in Their Dhows in the Red Sea, around the Coasts of Arabia, and to Zanzibar and Tanganyika; Pearling in the Persian Gulf; and the Life of the Shipmasters and the Mariners of Kuwait* (1940; repub. 2006), pp. 318–319.

[43] Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (1985), p. 148.

The presence of Indian-built dhows in the Gulf, therefore, must be quite ancient. While Gulf demand for Indian-built dhows evaporated in 1930 due to the Great Depression and the collapse of the Gulf pearling industry, it recovered after the 1973 oil boom. Today, Calicut is still a major dhow-building centre, where ships are built on commission for customers in the GCC states, continuing a millennia-old tradition.[44] The Malabar Coast's ancient connections with the Persian Gulf are symbolized by the Indo-Gulf origins of its name: *Mala*, from Malayalam (the language of Kerala) meaning "hill" or "mountain", referring to the western Ghats that run parallel to the coast, and *bār* (بار) from Persian meaning "coast" — a suffix added by the Persian and Arab traders who connected the Gulf and India across the ages. While the name *Mālābār* (مالابار), sometimes spelt *Malaybār* or *Malībār* (ملیبار), was commonly used for the Malabar Coast in both India and the Persian Gulf, the Persians and Arabs also referred to it as the "Pepper Coast" (*Sāḥil-e Felfel* in Persian, *Sāḥil al-Filfil* in Arabic) after its most famous export, which was a key commodity in the ancient spice trade.

One of the greatest symbols of wealth in the pre-oil Gulf were the large decorative doors made of teak or sandalwood that adorned the homes of the ruling families and prominent merchant families in every Gulf port, like the ones in Figures 8–9. The doors were usually imported pre-carved from Gujarat, a region famous for its carving industry and an ancient trading partner of the Gulf. The simpler, undecorated doors of humbler homes were made by local carpenters from cheaper wood, although still imported from India.

A common furniture item found in most Gulf homes was the "Arab" chest, such as the one appearing in Figure 10, used to store clothes. The name is misleading, however, for the adjective usually applied to the owner, not the maker. Arab chests originated as an Indian copy of a Portuguese seaman's chest from the days of the *Estado da Índia*, Portugal's Indian Empire,

Figures 8–9: Traditional Gulf Arab doors from India. *Left:* display in Gallery 6 (Life on the Coast), National Museum of Qatar. *Right:* Shaikh ʿAbdullāh Āl Thānī's palace, National Museum of Qatar.[45]

[44] For more about dhows, see: Agius, *In the Wake of the Dhow: The Arabian Gulf and Oman* (2002) and Al-Hijji, *The Art of Dhow-Building in Kuwait* (2001).

[45] Photos by James Onley, 2019.

Figure 10: An Arab chest.[46]

encompassing western India, the lower Gulf, and East Africa in the 16th to 18th centuries. Most chests were made of Indian teak or rosewood. Many were made by craftsmen in Kachchh, Gujarat, Bombay, and Kerala, although some were made by Kuwaiti, Omani, and Iranian carpenters using Indian materials.[47]

One of the most obvious examples of Indian influence on Gulf material culture is the Kashmiri shawl, commonly worn by Gulf Arabs and Yemenis since the 18th century. In Qatar and the northern Gulf states, it is worn as a headscarf (the *shumāgh* or *ghutrah*) with a headrope (the *ʿagāl*) to hold it in place, like the one in Figure 11; in the Emirates, Oman, southern Bushehr province and western Hormozgan province in Iran, and Yemen, it is worn as a turban, known as the *ʿimāmā* in the UAE and *muṣar* in Oman (like the one in Figure 12). Standard Kashmiri shawls are made from Cashmere wool from Cashmere goats, while the finest and most expensive Kashmiri shawls are made from Pashmina wool from Pashmina (Changthangi) goats. Cashmere and Pashmina goat wool is much stronger, finer, lighter, and warmer than sheep wool. White shawls with a band of Indo-Persian embroidery (from the Mughal era) inset from the edge are worn in eastern and southern Arabia as well as southern Iran, while coloured shawls with extensive Indo-Persian embroidery are also popular in southern Arabia.

Another headdress of likely Indian or Indo-Persian origin used by the Gulf Arabs was the multi-coloured cotton turban worn by two Gulf Arab ruling families, the Āl Bū-Saʿīd of Oman and the Qawāsim of Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, and Lengeh, as well as the *Hawāla* (هوّله) or *Hūla* (هوله), a transnational Gulf Arab merchant community found in eastern Arabia, southern Bushehr province and western Hormozgan province in Iran, and the wider Indian Ocean. Examples appear in Figures 13–14. Today, only the Āl Bū-Saʿīd still wear such a turban, which they call the *al-Saʿīdī*. While the turbans worn by the others until the 1940s varied somewhat in colour, pattern and shape, the *al-Saʿīdī* has a specific shape and look unique to the Āl Bū-Saʿīd.

Another common Indian item found in most Gulf homes was the peacock mirror, made in Bombay for the Gulf market during the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. Examples appear in Figures 15–16. The mirrors varied considerably in design, but usually featured two symmetrical Indian peacocks (male peafowls) facing each other. Peacocks are indigenous to India but exotic in the Gulf, where they symbolized beauty, fertility, and wealth. Peacock mirrors were purchased by Gulf Arab families in eastern Arabia and southern Iran during their seasonal visits to Bombay as gifts for newlywed couples. As one of the national symbols of India, peacocks also encapsulated the Gulf perception of India as a land of colour and beauty admired for its Persianate high culture.

[46] Item FBQ.226, Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum, Qatar.
[47] For more about Arab chests, see: Unwin, *The Arab Chest* (2006).

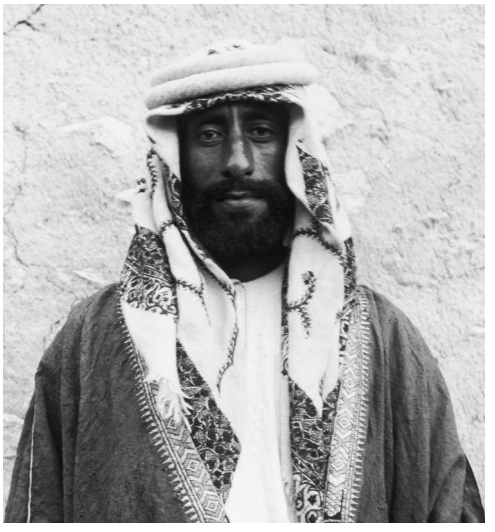


Figure 11: Jāsim bin Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Doha, 1904, wearing a Kashmiri shawl.[48]

Figure 12: A *muṣar* worn by HM Sulṭān Qābūs bin Saʿīd Āl Bū-Saʿīd, 2013.[49]

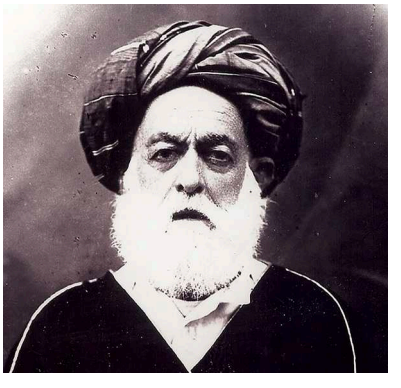


Figure 13: A *Hūlī* turban worn by Hajji Muḥammad ʿAqīl Farūq, *c*.1900.[50]

Figure 14: HM Faiṣal bin Turkī Āl Bū-Saʿīd (Sulṭān of Oman, 1888–1913), *left*, in 1911 with his son, HH Taimūr bin Faiṣal Āl Bū-Saʿīd (later Sulṭān of Oman, 1913–32), *right*.[51]

Figure 15: A peacock mirror in Radwani House, Msheireb Museums, Doha, early 20th century.[52]

Figure 16: A modern replica of a peacock mirror in the house of Ḥajj ʿAbdullah bin Shāhīn Al-Tarāshī (now a museum: the Kish Native Anthropology House), Kish, Iran, 2016.[53]

6 From cultural influence to cultural confluence

The shipping routes across the Arabian Sea that have linked India and the Persian Gulf for over four millennia are the world's oldest cultural crossroads. The ancient commercial connections and cultural contact between the Indian subcontinent and the Gulf have resulted in far more than cultural influence, however. During periods of high trade intensity through the Indo-Gulf corridor (shown in Tables II–III), the coastlines around the Gulf and Arabian Sea — from eastern Arabia to the western Indian subcontinent — became a zone of cultural *confluence*. To comprehend how deep this confluence goes, one need only look at the prevalence of Islam throughout the Indian subcontinent, the tens of thousands of Arabic and Persian loanwords in Indian languages, the prevalence of Indian numbers and cuisine in the Gulf and the wider Middle East, or the countless cultural traditions shared between the Indian subcontinent and the Gulf, such as the pre-wedding henna ceremony, known as *mehndi* (henna) in South Asia and *laylat al-ḥinnāʾ* (henna night) in the Persian Gulf. Each has adopted from the other and made it their own, part of their cultural DNA. India and the Persian Gulf are cultural cousins.

[48] Photograph taken during 28–30 January 1904 by Hermann Burchardt. © bpk-Bildagentur / Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Hermann Burchardt collection, Foto K581.

[49] US Government Flicker page, US Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to Oman, 21 May 2013, www.flickr.com/photos/statephotos/8768630250/sizes/o/in/photostream. Image cropped.

[50] Farooq family's Flickr page, "eminence ii", uploaded 2014, www.flickr.com/photos/rashidfarooq.

[51] Stuart and Ethel Knox, *Photo Album of the Persian Gulf, 1907–12.*

[52] Photo by James Onley, 2019.

[53] Photo by James Onley, 2016.

When goods, concepts, or religions are imported from one culture to another, so are the words associated with them. The extent of Arabic and Persian influence on India should come as no surprise, therefore; they form a part of India's linguistic DNA. Not only does the word "India" originate from the Old Persian name for India — *Hindūs*, later *Hindūstan* — but the vernacular language of northern Hindustan itself, *Hindūstanī*, emerged as a result of the central role of the Persian language (with its thousands of Arabic loanwords) in government, education, and literature in north India during the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughal Empire (1526–1857). After the collapse of the Khwarazmian and Safavid empires in Iran the 13th and 18th centuries (following the Mongol and Afghan invasions), many Persian bureaucrats, scholars, poets, and artisans moved to India, which became a major centre of the Persianate literary and cultural world as a result — particularly in cities like Delhi, Agra, Lahore, and Hyderabad.[54] During this time, thousands of everyday words of Perso-Arabic origin entered the local Sanskrit-derived language of *Kharī Bolī* spoken in and around Delhi and Agra (the capital cities), resulting in an amalgam based on *Kharī Bolī* grammar, syntax, and basic vocabulary. Colloquial Hindustani became the *lingua franca* across north India outside of government, education, and literature.

Over the course of centuries, two main styles of Hindustani evolved, which were eventually codified in the 19th century and are today considered separate languages. One is Urdu (اُردُو), also known as *Hindūstanī* in the 19th century, which became a symbol of Muslim cultural identity in northern India. It is written in the sloped *Nastaʿlīq* (نستعلیق) style of Arabic developed in Iran in the 14th and 15th centuries for writing Persian, and borrows heavily from Persian and Arabic — especially formal and literary Urdu, where 25% of the vocabulary is Perso-Arabic in origin. The other style of Hindustani is Hindi (हिन्दी), which became a symbol of Hindu cultural identity in northern India. It is written in the *Devanāgarī* (देवनागरी) script used to write Sanskrit (the sacred language of Hindus), is orientated towards Sanskrit, and contains fewer Perso-Arabic loanwords as a result — especially formal and literary Hindi. At the colloquial level, however, Urdu and Hindi remain mutually intelligible and are, essentially, colloquial Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu). Bollywood releases its films in colloquial Hindustani for this reason. But Hindustani is just one example; most languages of northern India, such as Punjabi, Gujarati, and Bengali, contain thousands of Perso-Arabic loanwords. Even the name Punjab (پنجاب) is of Persian origin: it comes from *panj āb* (پنج آب), meaning "five waters", referring to the region's five major rivers.[55]

Just as the Persian Gulf has left a significant linguistic imprint on the Indian subcontinent, so too has the Indian subcontinent influenced Gulf Arabic. This has especially been the case since the rapid expansion of the South Asian expatriate population in the GCC states since the 1970s. The millions of Hindustani speakers in these states have left their linguistic mark, as Table XI illustrates. One of the most widely used words in Gulf Arabic is *sīdā* (سيدا, straight), which is borrowed from Hindustani. When asking for directions, you will hear people say *rūḥ sīdā* (روح سيدا, go straight). This word is also used in a metaphorical sense. Arabs from the Gulf might say *ānā īnsān sīdā* (أنا انسان سيدا, I am a straightforward person). Arabs who are not from the Gulf or have not lived in the Gulf do not use *sīdā*.[56]

[54] Key studies of this include the works by Alam, Cole, Eaton, Kia, and Spooner cited in section 2 of the Bibliography.

[55] For more about the influence of Arabic and Persian on Hindustani, see: Kuczkiewicz-Fraś, *Perso-Arabic Loanwords in Hindustani* (2008); Mangrio, *The Morphology of Loanwords in Urdu: The Persian, Arabic and English Strands* (2016).

[56] Ahmad, "Waqt, Chaawal and Bollywood: The Deep Relationship between Indians and Arabs", *The Print*, 2 December 2018.

Table XI: Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu) loanwords in Gulf Arabic[57]

GULF ARABIC	URDU / HINDI ROOT	MEANING
كرك (*karak*)	کڑک / कड़क	strong tea
أجار (*ajār*)	اچار / अचार	pickles
جاول (*jāwal*)	چاول / चावल	steamed rice
جوله (*jūlā*)	چولها / चूलहा	a traditional kitchen stove
جوتى (*jūtī*)	جوتی / जूती	shoes
دوبي (*dūbī*)	دھوبی / धोबी	washermen/laundryman
رستة (*rasta*)	راستہ / रास्ता	street
قاري (*gārī*)	گاڑی / गाड़ी	bicycle
كجة (*kajjāh*)	کچا / कच्चा	A learner's permit to drive (literally "inexperienced")
بيمة (*bīmah*)	بیما / बीमा	insurance
سيدا (*sīdā*)	سیدھا / सीधा	straight
بنكة (*bankah*)	پنکھا / पंखा	fan
البَرْدَه (*al-bardah*)	پردا / परदा	curtains
تجوري (*tijūrī*)	تجوری / तिजोरी	safe-box

Table XII: The Indo-Arabic numeral system

Indian (Brahmi)	**Arabic** (Eastern Arabic) (الأرقام الهندية)	**Persian** (Indo-Arabic) (اعداد هندی-عربی)	**Western** (Western Arabic) (Indo-Arabic)
०	٠	۰	0
१	١	۱	1
२	٢	۲	2
३	٣	۳	3
४	٤	۴	4
५	٥	۵	5
६	٦	۶	6
७	٧	۷	7
८	٨	۸	8
९	٩	۹	9

Perhaps the most profound Indian linguistic influence on the Gulf — and one that would eventually influence the entire world — is the Brahmi numeral system, shown in Table XII. Arabs and Persians adopted it from India, with modifications, in the 9th century. In Arabic, it is known as "Indian numbers" (الأرقام الهندية) and, in Persian, as "Indo-Arabic numbers" (اعداد هندی-عربی). It was popularized throughout the Middle East by the Persian mathematician Muḥammad Al-Khwārizmī, known as Algoritmi in the West, in his *On Calculation with Indian Numerals*, written around 825 CE, and by the Arab mathematician Abu Yūsuf Al-Kindī, known as Alkindus in the West, in *On the Use of Indian Numerals*, written around 830. The Indo-Arabic numeral system gradually made its way to Europe through Latin translations of Algoritmi and Alkindus' works from Arabic, where it became known as "Arabic numerals", eventually replacing the Roman numeral system that had been used until then. Today, use of this numeral system is universal.

[57] Compiled by Rizwan Ahmad, Qatar University, 2019.

Another obvious influence of India on the Persian Gulf is the adoption of Indian food as "national" cuisine. Take, for example, rice. Rice does not grow in the Gulf region (except for a small amount in central Iraq) and has to be imported from South Asia.[58] Before the 20th century, rice appears to have been a luxury in the Gulf, eaten only by those who could afford it: members of ruling families and wealthy merchant families. Everyone else ate flat, unleavened bread. As Indian rice became more affordable and available in the early 20th century Gulf, however, it gradually displaced bread as the preferred accompaniment to meat and seafood in dishes such as *makbūs/machbus* (مكبوس) and *qūzī* (قوزي). The popular appearance of the South Asian dish of *biryānī* (برياني) in the Gulf appears to have been a part of this process. Today, biryani is so ubiquitous in the Gulf that it is regarded as a local dish. Another example of the adoption of South Asian food into national cuisine in the Gulf is *karak chai* (strong tea). The popularity of karak chai among both South Asians and GCC nationals in the Gulf has come to symbolize the culinary connections between the two. While karak chai is today regarded as a local drink in Qatar and the Emirates, it is in truth a Gulf version of *masala chai* (mixed-spice tea) from South Asia, using condensed milk instead of whole milk and one spice, cardamom, instead of many. It appears to have originated in the 1970s when South Asian expats began to arrive in Qatar and the Emirates in great numbers. In their attempts to brew masala chai, Indian expats made do with what was available locally, and the result was the drink we have today. The drink became popular with Qataris and the Emiratis and, over time, they adopted it as their own. Today, it can be found throughout the GCC states.

7 South Asian communities in the Gulf: the embodiment of Indo-Gulf connections

The South Asian communities in the ports and caravan towns of the Persian Gulf, and the corresponding Arab and Persian communities in India's coastal cities, were and are a physical manifestation of the intimate connections between the two regions in every aspect of daily life. Archaeological evidence dates the earliest South Asian communities in the Gulf back over four millennia ago to ancient Mesopotamia. Before the dawn of the oil era in the 1950s and 1960s, South Asian communities in the Gulf were small and largely mercantile, numbering in the low thousands. Since the oil era, the Indian communities in the Gulf have expanded dramatically. As of 2024, almost nine Indians and over four million Pakistanis live in the Gulf. Indians form the largest expat community in each GCC state and even outnumber the national populations in Qatar and the UAE.

The earliest written account of Indians in the Gulf, however, is a cuneiform tablet recording the words of the Akkadian king Sargon, who ruled during 2334 to 2279 BCE, in which he mentions "ships of Meluhha" (the Akkadian name for the Indus Valley Civilization) anchored at the city of Akkad.[59] There is also a cylinder seal dating from *c*.2200 to 2113 BCE belonging to an Akkadian translator of Meluhhan, indicating the presence of Meluhhan merchants in Akkad.[60]

[58] In Iraq, rice is grown in the central region around Najaf, but it is inadequate for national needs, so additional rice is imported from South Asia. In Iran, rice is grown in the Caspian Sea provinces north of Tehran, but its transportation to the Persian Gulf was uneconomic before the mid-20th century.

[59] Cuneiform tablet *c*.2334–2279 BCE, Akkadian Empire, Iraq, image no. 296512, object no. B13972, Penn Museum, USA. Column 5, Lines 12–16 read "He [King Sargon] moored the ships of Meluhha [India], Magan [Oman], and Dilmun [Bahrain] at the quay of Akkad."

[60] Cylinder seal of Shu-ilishu, city of Akkad, Iraq, *c*.2200–2113 BCE, item AO 22310, Département des Antiquités orientales, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

The earliest written description in Arabic we have of Indians in the Gulf region comes from an account written by Abū Zayd Al-Sīrāfī in or before 303 AH (915–16 CE), contained in *Accounts of China and India* (*Al-Kitāb Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa-l-Hind*), a compilation of Gulf sailors' travel accounts to South and East Asia, which was one of the source texts for the Sindbad stories. In it, Al-Sīrāfī explains how:

> the Hindus come to Siraf [Iran's largest port at the time] and, when some Arab merchant invites them to feast, their number often approaches or exceeds a hundred. But a separate dish needs to be served before each, and none of them can eat off anybody else's dish.[61]

The large Hindu merchant community in early 10th century Siraf described by Abū Zayd Al-Sīrāfī would have remained there until Siraf's decline following a devastating earthquake in 977, after which it most likely relocated to the island of Kish off the Iranian coast, when it became the Gulf's leading port. When Hormuz island rose to prominence in the 13th century, contributing to Kish's decline, the community probably migrated there. During the height of Hormuz's prosperity in the early 14th to early 16th centuries, the presence of 2,000 Gujarati households, both Hindu and Muslim, on the island gave Hormuz the feel of an Indian city.[62] After Hormuz was destroyed as a trading centre by a combined Safavid-English force in 1622, the Indian community dispersed to Bandar Abbas and Muscat.

The oldest community in the Gulf today, also Hindu like the one in Siraf, seems to be the one in Muscat, which dates to at least the 15th century. The second oldest is probably the Hindu community in Manama, first mentioned in Dutch records in 1667, but which is almost certainly older than that.[63] The third oldest is the Lawātī community of Muscat and neighbouring Matrah, which dates from the mid-18th century.[64] The merchants, tradesmen and family members who made up these communities came mainly from Sindh, Kachchh, and historic Gujarat (the Kathiawar peninsula and mainland Gujarat), regions that straddle the southern border between present-day Pakistan and India.

Indian merchants connected the region with its most important trading partner: India. They played central roles in the economies of the Gulf ports, from small retail merchants to wealthy wholesale merchants or pearl merchants, and from cargo services to banking. During the 18th to 20th centuries, the main communities were to be found in Baghdad, Basra, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Muscat, Mutrah, Bushehr, Lengeh, Bandar Abbas, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Mashhad. The wealthiest members of the Indian merchant community in any given port exercised considerable influence with the local rulers and governors through financial dependency: the payment of tax, loans, financial gifts, and the general economic prosperity their trade brought to these ports.

---

[61] This quotation is from the first published version of his book, in French: *Anciennes relations des Indes et de la Chine* [Ancient Relations of India and China] (1718), translated by Eusèbe Renaudot from the original Arabic manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France: Arabe 2281, folios 24–56.

[62] Floor, *The Persian Gulf: A Political and Economic History of Five Port Cities, 1500–1730* (2006), pp. 16, 18, 29. The estimate of 2,000 Gujarati households is by Martín Fernández de Figueroa, who visited Hormuz in 1617.

[63] The records from 1667 are cited in Barendse, *The Arabian Seas, 1640–1700* (1998), p. 21 fn. 40. Willem Floor believes the community is much older than this (correspondence, March 2009). Claude Markovits dates the community to at least the early eighteenth century in his book, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (2000), pp. 11–12 and fn. 6.

[64] Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman", *Middle East Journal* 58.1 (Winter 2004), p. 42; Allen, "The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44.1 (January 1981), pp. 48–50.

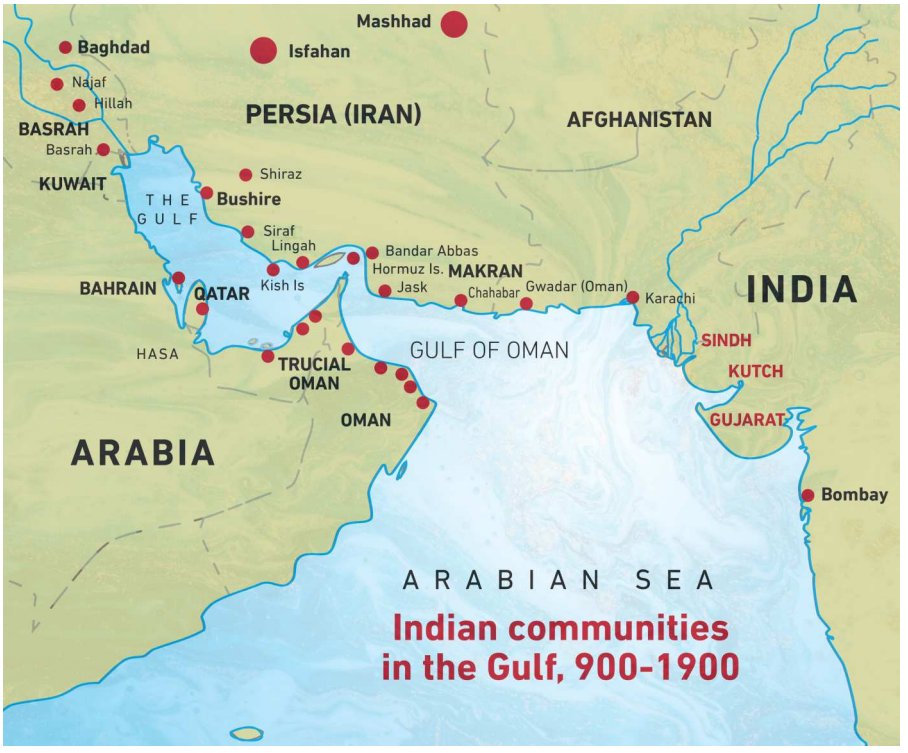


Figure 17: Indian communities in the Gulf, 900–1900.[65]

Table XIII: Indian merchant groups in Persian Gulf ports, 1700–1947

GROUP	ORIGINS	SECT	SUB-SECT
Bhatia Banians	Sindh & Kachchh (Kutch)	Vaishnava Hindu	Pushti Marg
Lohana Banians	Sindh & Kachchh	Vaishnava Hindu	Pushti Marg
Ithnāʿasharī Khojās	Sindh, Kachchh, & historic Gujarat[66]	Shīʿī Muslim	Ithnāʿasharī
Ismāʿīlī Khojās	Sindh, Kachchh, & historic Gujarat	Shīʿī Muslim	Nizārī Ismāʿīlī: (aka Āghā Khānī)
Lawātīyya (Lawātī Khojās)	Sindh & Kachchh, but Arabized and Omanized since the 1870s	Shīʿī Muslim	Ithnāʿasharī
Dāwūdī Bohras	Historic Gujarat	Shīʿī Muslim	Mustaʿlī Ismāʿīlī
Memons	Kachchh	Sunnī Muslim	Ḥanafī

Indian wholesale merchant firms were generally run as family businesses, with a large firm typically having family members in two or more Gulf ports. Members of the firm would circulate from port to port and from the Gulf to their hometown every few years.[67] Table XIII below shows the main Indian merchant groups in the Gulf.

[65] Map designed by James Onley and Shadi Ghonim, 2019.

[66] "Historic Gujarat" means Gujarat State before the incorporation of Kachchh State in 1960, i.e., the Kathiawar peninsula (Saurashtra) and mainland Gujarat.

[67] For the most extensive study of the Indian communities in the Gulf before oil, see: Onley, "Indian Communities in the Persian Gulf, *c.*1500–1947", in Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times: Ports, Peoples and History* (2014), pp. 231–266.

Photographic examples of these merchant family businesses appear in Figures 18–19. The first is of Ratansi Purshottam & Company in Muscat, one of Oman's longest-resident Indian family businesses. The Ratansi Purshottam family are Bhatia Banians from the port of Mandvi in Kachchh whose connection with Oman dates back to 1838. Of all the Gulf states, Oman has the strongest historical, commercial, and cultural connections with the Indian subcontinent. The second example is of Abbasbhai Hatimbhai, one of Bahrain's longest-resident Indian family businesses, founded by two bothers, Abbas and Hatim, in 1911. The suffix *bhai* is a Gujarati honorific meaning "brother". The two bothers and their descendants, the Abbasbhai and Hatimbhai families, are Dāwūdī Bohras from Gujarat.

Today, almost nine million Indians — both Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) — live and work in the Gulf region, along with over four million Pakistanis, as Tables XIV and XV show.

The GCC states have the largest concentration of Indian and Pakistani expats anywhere in the world, with the UAE having the world's largest Indian expat community and Saudi Arabia having the largest Pakistani expat community. The Gulf's Indian and Pakistani expat population has grown steadily in size since the dawn of the oil era, to the extent that Indians are now the largest expat community in the GCC, even outnumbering the national populations in Qatar and the UAE, where they form 27% and 32% of the total population respectively as of 2024.

The historical Indian merchant communities in Arabia, Iran, and Iraq had corresponding Arab communities in India, mainly in the ports of the Konkan Malabar coasts such as Bombay and Calicut. Further north, the coasts of Sindh, Kachchh, and Gujarat also attracted Arab merchants, but few actually settled there, with the exception of the ports of Broach, Cambay, Surat, and Karachi during their heyday (see Table VIII), as well as Gwadar, a dependency of Oman 300 miles to the west of Karachi during 1784–1958.[68]

Table XIV: Indians in the Gulf, 2024[69]

COUNTRY	EXPATS	% OF POP.
UAE	3,568,848	31.91%
Saudi Arabia	2,463,509	7.10%
Kuwait	995,528	19.99%
Qatar	836,784	27.40%
Oman	686,635	13.10%
Bahrain	327,807	20.64%
Iraq	17,104	0.037%
Iran	10,765	0.011%
TOTAL	**8,906,980**	**4.47%**

Table XV: Pakistanis in the Gulf, c.2020[70]

COUNTRY	EXPATS	% OF POP.
Saudi Arabia	1,814,678	5.64%
UAE	1,600,000	17.24%
Kuwait	339,033	7.71%
Oman	250,092	5.53%
Qatar	235,505	8.40%
Bahrain	117,000	7.89%
Iran	14,320	0.017%
Iraq	688	0.002%
TOTAL	**4,371,729**	**2.45%**

[68] Very little has been written about Arab merchant communities in India. Key works are those by Albedwawi, Benjamin, Bishara (2014), Hassan J., Mathew, and Mohamed and Mohammad listed in section 2 of the Bibliography.

[69] Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Consular Services, "Population of Overseas Indians" (NRIs and PIOs combined), December 2024, www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm.

[70] Wikipedia, "Pakistani Diaspora", December 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistani_diaspora. The dates and sources for each estimate vary: Saudi Arabia (2022), UAE (2019–20), Kuwait (2020), Oman (2020), Qatar (2020), Bahrain (2019–20), Iraq (2020), and Iran (2016). The statistics on this Wikipedia page, compiled from multiple sources, appear to be far more accurate than those provided by Pakistan's Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, which estimates 217,281 expats in the Gulf region in 2020 instead of 4,371,729. When estimating the expat population percentages for each country, I used the national population estimates for the relevant years (such as 2022 for Saudi Arabia).

Figure 18: Owners, senior management and staff of Ratansi Purshottam & Co., taken in *c*.1910 at Bait Ratansi (Ratansi House), Old Muscat, near Qasr al-ʻAlam.[71]

Figure 19: Abbasbhai Hatimbhai shop, Manama souq, *c*.1940s.[72]

[71] Private collection of Vimal Purecha, Partner of Ratansi Purshottam & Co.
[72] Bahrain National Museum, Manama.

8 Indo-Gulf empires: the common political history of South and West Asia

The commercial and cultural connections between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf have risen and fallen in intensity through the centuries since the mid-3rd millennium BCE. On at least 15 occasions, these connections culminated in the political incorporation of parts of the two regions into a single empire, as Table XVI below shows.

Table XVI: Indo-Gulf empires, 518 BCE–1947 CE

		REGIONS ENCOMPASSED	
DATES	EMPIRE	SOUTH ASIA	WEST ASIA
518–327 BCE	Achaemenid Empire	Indus Valley (Sindh/Punjab), Balochistan	Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman
326–316 BCE	Macedonian Empire	Indus Valley (Sindh/Punjab), Balochistan	Iran, Iraq, Kuwait
120s BCE–210s CE	Parthian Empire	Indus Valley (Sindh/Punjab), Balochistan	Iran, Iraq, E. Arabia
284–410 CE	Sasanid Empire	Indus Valley (Sindh/Punjab), Balochistan, Gujarat	Iran, Iraq, E. Arabia, S. Arabia
711–747	Umayyad Empire	Balochistan, Sindh, W. Punjab	Iran, Iraq, Arabia
750–871	Abbasid Empire	Balochistan, Sindh, W. Punjab	Iran, Iraq, Arabia
870s–890s	Saffarid Empire	Balochistan, Sindh, W. Punjab	Iran
900s–990s	Samanid Empire	Balochistan, Sindh, S.W. Punjab	N. & E. Iran
1011–1186	Ghaznavid Empire	Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Kashmir, Delhi	N. & E. Iran
1186–1215	Ghurid Empire	Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Gujarat, N. India	N. & E. Iran
1398–1405	Tamurid Empire	Balochistan, Punjab, Kashmir, Delhi	Iran, Iraq
1740–1747	Afsharid Empire	Balochistan, Sindh	Iran, Bahrain, Oman
1507–1650	Portuguese Indian Empire (*Estado da Índia*)	W. & E. India (coast only)	S.E. Iran (Hormozgan), E. Arabia
1784–1958	Omani Empire	Gwadar	Oman, Qeshm island (S.E. Iran)
1820–1947	British Indian Empire (British Raj)	All India	E. & S. Arabia

India derives its very name from this imperial connection, from *Hindūs*, the Old Persian name for the Indus Valley — adopted from *Sindhū* (the Sanskrit name for the Indus River). Hindūs was the 20th satrapy (province) of the Achaemenid Empire during 518 to 327 BCE, as you can see from the map in Figure 20. After the Greek conquest of the Indus Valley in 327–26 BCE and its incorporation into the Macedonian Empire, the Greeks called their province *Indós*, their adaptation of the Old Persian name, which was later Latinized as *India.*

Between 1507 and 1650, the lower Persian Gulf formed part of Portugal's Indian Empire, known as the *Estado da Índia* (State of India). Headquartered in Goa, the Estado da Índia

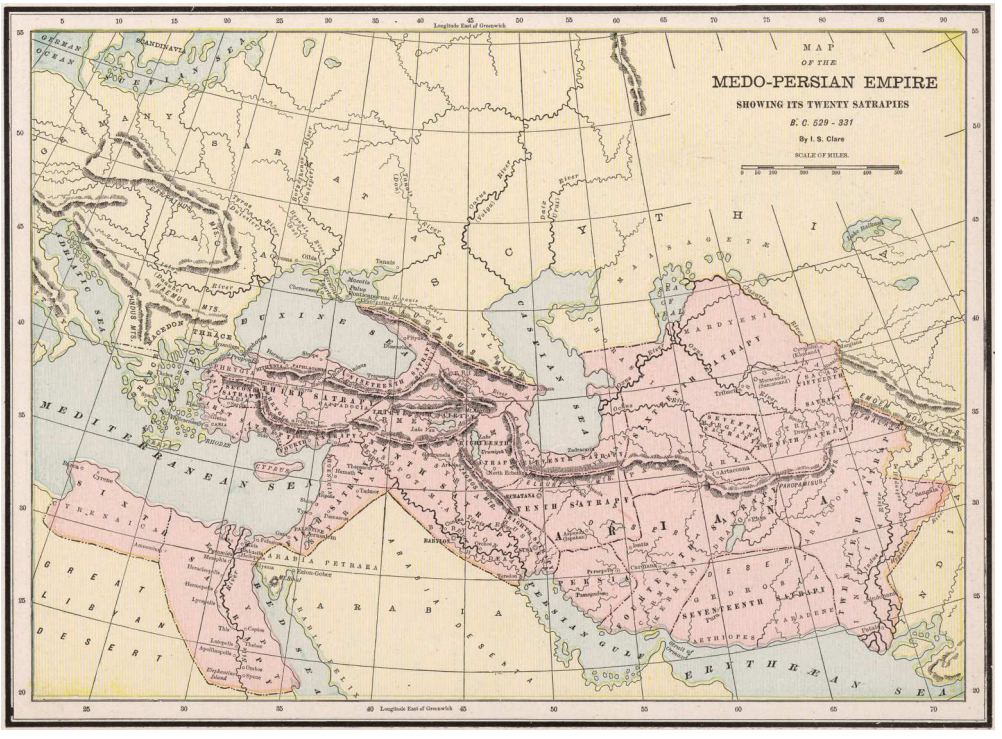


Figure 20: Map of the Achaemenid Empire.[73]

was, in fact, an Indian Ocean empire encompassing more than two dozen ports across coastal India and Sri Lanka, and a network of forts around the lower Persian Gulf and East Africa, as the map in Figure 21 and Table XVII show.[74] The Portuguese used of the *cartaz* (trade licence) system in the Gulf to channel all trade with India through Portuguese-controlled ports, where it was taxed. This had a dampening impact on trade, reducing Indo-Gulf trade intensity from a very high level in the early 16th century to high-to-moderate levels by the mid-16th century.

Between 1820 and 1947, large parts of eastern and southern Arabia formed part of the British Indian Empire, known simply as the Indian Empire or the British Raj. The origins of Arabia's incorporation into the Indian Empire began with the establishment of the English East India Company in western India and the lower Gulf in the early 17th century. In the mid-18th century, the East India Company evolved into a political power with its own army and navy, assuming control over increasing parts of the Mughal Empire, Arabia, and East Africa from 1765 onwards, culminating in the overthrow of the last Mughal Emperor in 1858, the transfer

[73] "Map of the Medo-Persian [Achaemenid] Empire, Showing Its Twenty Satrapies [Provinces], BC 529–331", scale: 1:15,000,000, Cram, *Cram's Atlas of the World, Ancient and Modern* (1901), p. 567, David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford University.

[74] For more about the Estado da Índia in the Gulf, see: e Cunha, "Portugal: Relations with Persia in the Early Modern Age (1500–1750)", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2001); e Cunha, "The Portuguese in the Persian Gulf", in Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in History* (2009), pp. 207–234; Matthee, "The Portuguese Presence in the Persian Gulf: An Overview", in Macris and Kelly (eds), *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (2012), pp. 1–12.

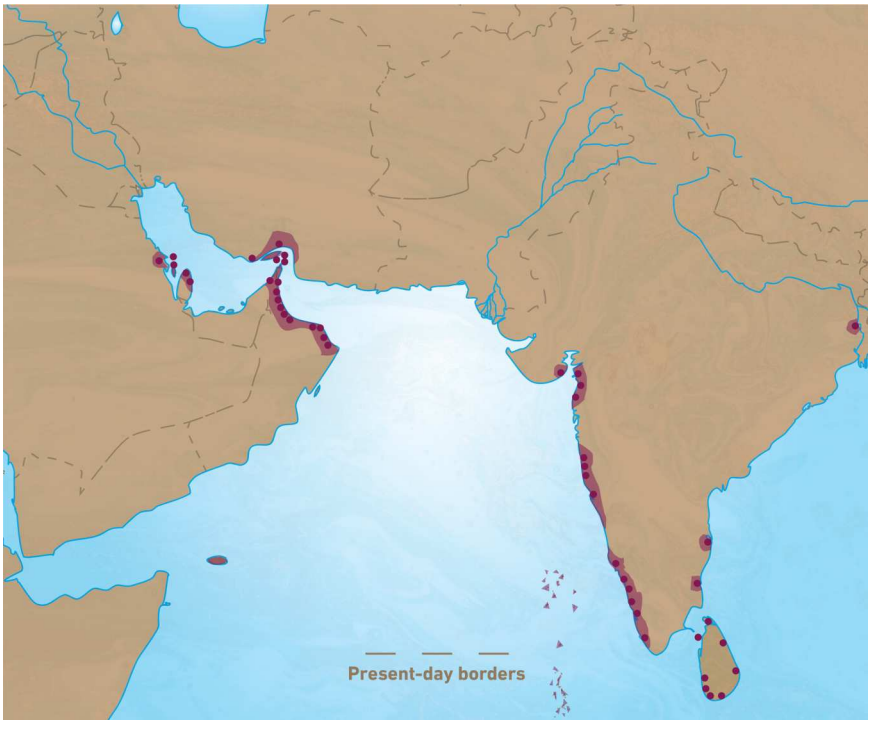


Figure 21: Map of the Estado da Índia, 16–17th centuries.[75]

of control from the East India Company to the British Crown the same year, and the British monarch's adoption of the Mughal Emperor's title in 1876 as heir to the Mughal throne. In this way, the Mughal Empire was transformed into the Indian Empire.

The Indian Empire consisted of two parts: British India (colonies, ruled directly) and the nominally-independent states surrounding it, which had signed unequal treaties of alliance with the British Government of India. The latter, numbering over 700 states with their own rulers, had relinquished control of their defence and external affairs to the Government of India in return for protection from their enemies. Over the course of the 19th century, these states came to include Kuwait, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah, and (unofficially) Oman, as well as all of southern Yemen, known as the Aden Protectorate. Qatar was the last to join the Indian Empire, in 1916, after it left the Ottoman Empire the year before. Even the Emirate of Najd and Hasa (what would later become the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) belonged briefly to this empire from 1915 to 1927. See the map in Figure 22 showing the empire during 1927–47, after the Saudis left. The Indian Empire also maintained spheres of influence in southern Iran and Ottoman Iraq, while the Government of India controlled Iraq directly during 1914–21.

The East India Company and its successor, the British Government of India, were responsible for India and Britain's relations with the Gulf states. They maintained an extensive network of

[75] Map designed by James Onley and Shadi Ghonim, 2019.

Table XVII: Estado da Índia's forts in the Gulf

COUNTRY	LOCATION
Iran	Hormuz island Qeshm island Larak island Bandar Abbas Bandar Kong
Oman	Khasab Sohar Barka Seeb Mutrah Muscat Quriyat Qalhat
UAE	Julfar, Ras al-Khaimah Dibba al-Hisn, Fujairah Bidyah, Fujairah Khor Fakkan, Sharjah Mirbah, Fujairah Kalba, Sharjah
Qatar	Ruwayda? Huwailah?
Bahrain	Muharraq island Abu Mahir island Manama
Saudi Arabia	Tarut island Qatif

political representatives throughout the region, all reporting to a senior political officer, whose headquarters varied over the years, as Table XVIII shows.

The headquarters, known as the Political Residency in the Persian Gulf in the 19th and 20th centuries, was managed by the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf from the Indian Political Service, supported by a large Indian, Arab, Persian, and Armenian staff. The Gulf Resident reported to the Governor of Bombay until 1873 and then to the Indian Foreign Secretary in Calcutta, later New Delhi, until the end of the British Raj in 1947. The photograph in Figure 23 of the Indian Political Service staff at the Political Agency in Bahrain taken around 1910 illustrates how extensive Indian, Arab and Persian involvement was in maintaining the Indian Empire in the Persian Gulf — 10 of the 18 people on the Agency's staff were Indian. The senior official in the middle is Captain Stuart Knox, Political Agent in Bahrain during 1910–11. He was posted to states throughout the Indian Empire and its spheres of influence over the course of a four-decade career, including Kuwait, Oman, Iran, Iraq, Indian Balochistan, Mysore, and Hyderabad. This was typical for a member of the Indian Political Service.

Before the 20th century, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf initially preferred to appoint wealthy and influential Indian merchants as his representatives — either *Khojās* (Muslim Indian merchants) or *Banians* (Hindu merchants), shown in Table XIX below — whom he entrusted with India's daily commercial and political relations with the local governors and rulers.

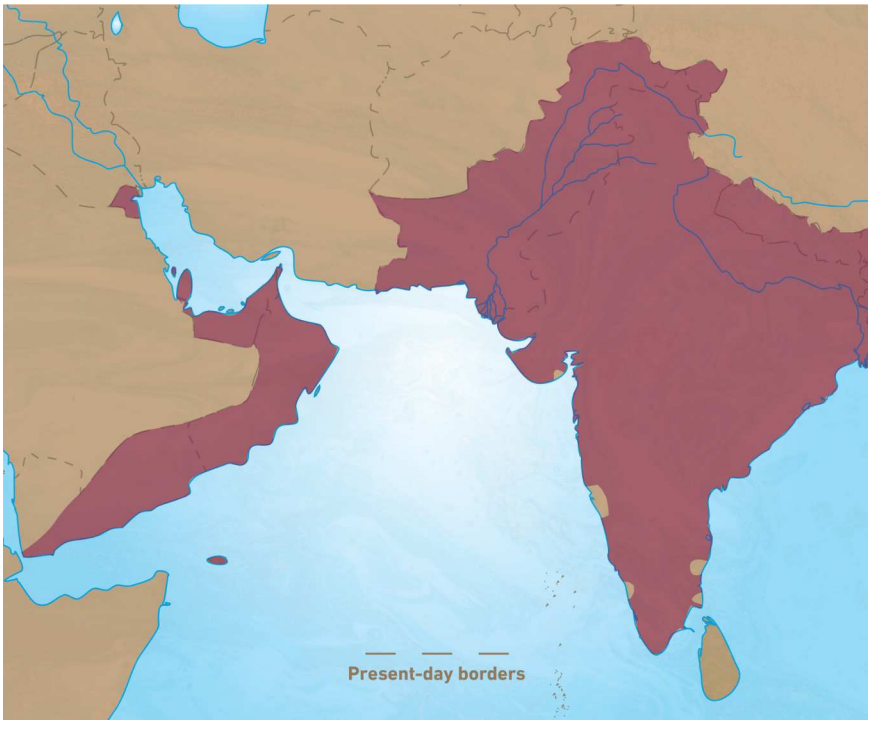


Figure 22: Map of the Indian Empire in South and West Asia *c.*1927–47.[76]

Table XVIII: British India's HQs in the Persian Gulf, 1616–1947

GULF HQ	OPERATED
Jask	1616–1623
Bandar Abbas	1623–1763
Basra	1763–1778
Bushehr	1778–1946
Qishm island	1820–1822 (for eastern Arabia only)
Bahrain	1946–1947

After the British Crown absorbed the last vestiges of the Mughal Empire in 1858, it continued the practice of awarding the Mughal titles such as *Khān Ṣāḥib* (Master Chief) and *Khān Bahādur* (Brave Chief) to those whose service to the Government of India deserved acknowledgment. To this it added new Mughal-inspired awards, such as the *Kaisar-i-Hind* (Emperor of India) medal, which it awarded to its civil servants, and two orders of chivalry, the Order of the Star of India and the Order of the Indian Empire, which it awarded to more senior government officials and to the ruling families of states under British Indian protection, including the states of eastern and southern Arabia. All of these British Indian awards and orders were

[76] Map designed by James Onley and Shadi Ghonim, 2019.

Figure 23: Indian Political Agency, Bahrain, 1911.[77]

Table XIX: Indian agents in the Persian Gulf, *c.*1758–1903

COUNTRY	AGENCY	AGENTS	PERIOD
Iran	Shiraz	Khojās from Sindh	1800–1903
Oman	Muscat	Banians from Sindh/Kachchh	*c.*1758–1800, 1810–1840
	Gwadar	Khojās from Sindh	1880–1958
Bahrain	Manama	Banians from Sindh/Kachchh	1816–1834
Iraq	Karbala	Shīʿī Indians	*c.*1852–1903
	Kadhimiya (Kadhimain)	Shīʿī Indians	*c.*1852–1903

granted to the ruling families and merchant families of eastern and southern Arabia in the course of the 20th century.[78]

Between 1864 and 1947, the Persian Gulf formed part of the Bombay Postal Circle, overseen by the Post Master General of Bombay, the head of the Bombay General Post Office (GPO). Sea mail within the Gulf and between the Gulf and India was transported aboard British India Steam Navigation Company ships, which sailed regularly between Bombay and Basra. Indian post offices were maintained at various times in Baghdad, Karbala, Basra, Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, Sharjah, Muscat, Gwadar, Chahabar Jask, Bandar Abbas, Lengah, Bushehr, Shiraz,

[77] Stuart and Ethel Knox, *Photo Album of the Persian Gulf, 1907–12.*

[78] For more about the British Indian Empire in the Gulf, see: Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (2007) and Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858–1947* (2003).

Figure 24: Shaikh Aḥmad al-Ṣabaḥ, Ruler of Kuwait, 1930, wearing two Indian orders of chivalry: the Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire (K.C.I.E.) and the Companion of the Order of the Star of India (C.S.I.).[79]

Figure 25: Indian stamps used in Oman (George VI, Emperor of India 1936–1947).[80]

Muhammarah (renamed Khorramshahr in 1925), and Ahvaz. Qatar did not have an Indian post office, so letters had to be sent to the Indian post offices in Bahrain or Dubai to be posted. In the absence of a local postal system in eastern Arabia (and Iran before 1878), most people in the Gulf used the Indian postal system, which used Indian stamps, paid for in Indian rupees. After World War I, the Indian post offices in Kuwait and Bahrain began over-stamping the Indian stamps with KUWAIT and BAHRAIN, respectively, while the Indian post office in Oman over-stamped with

[79] Photo by Lt.-Col. Harold R.P. Dickson of the Indian Political Service on the occasion of Shaikh Aḥmad's K.C.I.E investiture by the Government of India [Photo 163, Album 2, Harold Dickson Papers, Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, University of Oxford]. Photo cropped and edited by James Onley.

[80] Persian Gulf stamp collection of James Onley.

the name of the royal family in Arabic (آل بوسعيد, Āl Bū-Saʿīd) in 1363 AH (1944) to mark the 200th year of the family's rule, as shown in Figure 25.[81]

9 Indo-Gulf relations today

After the demise of the Indian Empire in 1947 and eastern Arabia's reorientation away from the Indian subcontinent towards the Arab world and the West in the following decades, India ceased to be the Gulf's main business partner. This change was symbolized by the abandonment of the Indian rupee in favour of new national currencies in the 1960s and the disappearance of the British India Steam Navigation Company in 1972. In the meantime, two generations of Gulf Arabs grew up without knowing India or Pakistan, and the memory of the Gulf's heavy dependency on the Indian subcontinent faded.

In the 2000s, however, trade links between eastern Arabia and India began a slow recovery to their historic levels of intensity following the GCC states' adoption of a "Look East" policy.[82] To promote this policy, the GCC states have sent an ever-increasing number of high-level delegations to India, shown in Table XX.

Table XX: GCC state delegations to India[83]

YEAR	STATE	DELEGATIONS		
1997	Oman:	• Sultan		
1999	Qatar:	• Emir		
2004	Bahrain:	• Prime Minister		
2005	Qatar:	• Emir		
2006	Kuwait: KSA:	• Amir • King		
2007	Bahrain: UAE: Oman:	• Crown Prince • Prime Minister • Deputy Prime Minister	• Foreign Minister	
2009	UAE:	• Foreign Minister		
2010	UAE:	• Prime Minister	• Foreign Trade Minister	
2011	UAE:	• Deputy Prime Minister	• Foreign Minister	
2012	Bahrain: Qatar: UAE:	• Crown Prince • Emir • Foreign Minister • Foreign Trade Minister	• Financial Affairs Minister of State	• Abu Dhabi Investment Authority Managing Director

(*Continued*)

[81] For more about the Indian Postal Service in the Gulf, see: Donaldson, *The Postal Agencies in Eastern Arabia and the Gulf* (1975) and Parsons, *The Indian Postal Agencies in the Persian Gulf Area* (2001).

[82] For the most recent study of the GCC states' "Look East" policy, see: Janardhan (ed.), *The Arab Gulf's Pivot to Asia* (2020). Chapters 1, 5, and 8 concern India.

[83] See: P.P. Chaudhuri, "Think West to Go West: Origins and Implications of India's West Asia Policy Under Modi", Parts I and II, Middle East Institute website, 26 September 2017 and 24 October 2017; Janardhan, "India's 'Think West' Matches Gulf's 'Look East' Policy", in Janardhan (ed.), *The Arab Gulf's Pivot to Asia* (2020), pp. 81–96.

Table XX: Continued.

YEAR	STATE	DELEGATIONS		
2013	Kuwait:	• Prime Minister		
	Bahrain:	• Crown Prince		
	UAE:	• Foreign Minister	• Finance Minister of State	
2014	Bahrain:	• King		
	UAE:	• Economy Minister	• Commander of the UAE Air Force	
		• Energy Minister		
	Oman:	• Foreign Minister (2 times)		
2015	Bahrain:	• Foreign Minister	• Interior Minister	
	Qatar:	• Emir		
	UAE:	• Foreign Minister		
2016	Bahrain:	• Commerce Minister	• Labor Minister	
	Qatar:	• Prime Minister		
	UAE:	• Abu Dhabi Crown Prince		
2017	Kuwait:	• Amir (private visit)		
	Qatar:	• Foreign Minister		
	UAE:	• Ruler of Sharjah	• Foreign Affairs Minister of State	
		• Abu Dhabi Crown Prince	• Minister of State	
		• Climate Change Minister		
	Oman:	• Foreign Minister		
2018	Qatar:	• Chief of Staff of the Qatari Armed Forces		
	UAE:	• Foreign Minister	• Climate Change Minister	• Defence Affairs Minister of State
		• Chief of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's Court (2 times)	• Tolerance Minister	
			• Foreign Affairs Minister of State	• CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company
		• Energy Minister		
	Oman:	• Sultan	• Defence Minister	• Environment Minister
2019	Kuwait:	• Director General of the Kuwait Institute of Scientific Research		
	KSA:	• Crown Prince		
	Qatar:	• Transport Minister	• Commander of the Qatari Navy	
	UAE:	• Foreign Minister	• Climate Change Minister	
		• Defence Minister	• Food Security Minister of State	
		• Economy Minister		
2020	Qatar:	• Deputy Prime Minister	• Energy Affairs Minister of State	
		• Defence Minister		
	UAE:	• Climate Change Minister	• Defence Affairs Minister of State	
	Oman:	• Defence Minister		
2021	Bahrain:	• Foreign Minister		
	Kuwait:	• Foreign Minister		
	UAE:	• Foreign Minister	• Foreign Trade Minister of State	
		• Diplomatic Advisor		
	Oman:	• Diplomatic Affairs Undersecretary		
2022	KSA:	• Energy Minister	• Finance Minister	
	Bahrain:	• Foreign Political Affairs Undersecretary	• Chief of the Economic Development Board	• CEO of the National Health Regulatory Authority
	Qatar:	• Special Envoy of the Foreign Minister for Counter Terrorism		
	UAE:	• Foreign Minister	• Climate Change Minister	
		• Economy Minister	• International Cooperation Minister of State	
		• Industry Minister	• Director of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority	
	Oman:	• Foreign Minister	• Commerce Minister	

(*Continued*)

Table XX: Continued.

YEAR	STATE	DELEGATIONS		
2023	Kuwait:	• Assistant Foreign Minister		
	KSA:	• Crown Prince	• Energy Minister	• Human Resources Minister
		• Foreign Minister	• Hajj & Umrah Minister	• Environment Minister
		• Finance Minister (3 times)	• Tourism Minister	• Health Minister
		• Commerce Minister	• Communication Minister	• Shura Council President
		• Investment Minister	• Education Minister	
	Bahrain:	• Crown Prince	• Commerce Minister	• Transport Minister
	Qatar:	• Transport Minister	• Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce	
	UAE:	• President	• Minister of State	
		• Foreign Minister (2 times)	• International Cooperation Minister of State	
	Oman:	• Sultan	• Economy Minister	• Heritage Minister
		• Foreign Minister	• Energy Minister	• Agriculture Minister
		• Deputy Prime Minister	• Transport Minister	• Labour Minister
		• Commerce Minister	• Higher Ed Minister	• Health Minister
2024	KSA:	• Chief of Staff of the Navy	• Assistant Investment Minister	
	Bahrain:	• Minister of Industry & Commerce		
	Qatar:	• Energy Affairs Minister of State		
	UAE:	• President	• Abu Dhabi Crown Prince	• Foreign Minister

Table XXI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visits to the Gulf states

YEAR	VISITS
2015:	UAE
2016:	Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran
2017:	
2018:	UAE, Oman
2019:	Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE
2020:	
2021:	
2022:	UAE
2023:	Saudi Arabia, UAE (2 times)
2024:	Kuwait, Qatar, UAE

Table XXII: India's Minister for External Affairs visits to the Gulf states since 2014[84]

YEAR	VISITS
2014:	Bahrain, UAE
2015:	Oman
2016:	Bahrain
2017:	
2018:	Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman
2019:	UAE (2 times), Oman
2020:	Bahrain, Qatar, UAE (2 times)
2021:	Kuwait, Qatar, UAE (2 times), Iran
2022:	KSA, Bahrain, Qatar (2 times), UAE (2 times)
2023:	KSA, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE (2 times)
2024:	Kuwait, KSA, Bahrain, Qatar (2 times), UAE (2 times), Iran

[84] India had two Ministers of External Affairs during this time: Sushma Swaraj (26 May 2014–30 August 2019) and Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar (30 August 2019–present).

When Narendra Modi was elected Prime Minister of India in 2014, he introduced a corresponding "Link West" policy to help promote India's links with West Asia in the wake of declining oil prices and increasing competition for business with the GCC.[85] To promote his policy, Modi has made more state visits to the Gulf states than any previous Indian PM (see Table XXI). In addition to this, India's Minister for External Affairs and has made several visits to the Gulf states since 2014, as Table XXII shows.

Bilateral trade and security ties have returned to their historic levels of intensity as a result of these policies and state visits, with a long list of agreements and memorandums of understanding to show for it. But the tables have turned: now the GCC states are *India's* largest regional-bloc trading partner, surpassing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU), while Qatar is India's largest supplier of liquid natural gas (LNG). India's relationship with the GCC states is not just about trade and expatriates, however; it has become an important strategic partnership.[86]

10 Conclusion

While many studies have examined individual aspects of Indo-Gulf connections, this is the first to summarise their overall substance, dynamics, and significance across the entire history of the Indo-Gulf corridor, from the earliest records to the present day. It has shown that these two regions have contributed to and shaped each other's culture and history to such an extent that they cannot be considered mere neighbours. Over the course of millennia, they have become cultural cousins. Despite this, the depth and significance of these connections across the *longue durée* has been little appreciated in the literature. This is a natural consequence of scholarship on the two regions occurring in separate area study silos and their states' promotion of exclusionist national narratives since the mid-20th century. The notable exceptions are the newly-emerging field of Indian Ocean Studies and the Sultanate of Oman, whose national dress — part Arab, part Indo-Persian, part African — has incorporated its Indian Ocean heritage into the very fabric of its national identity.

The return of bilateral ties between India and the GCC states to their historic levels of intensity over the past decade is, therefore, the restoration of a natural balance. After a brief hiatus of two generations, their governments have a rekindled appreciation of their shared geography, interests, and history. They see, once again — as their ancestors did — that there is still much business to conduct, much prosperity to share, and much to contribute to each other.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

James Onley https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1831-406X

[85] The "bilateral relations" pages for the Indian embassy websites for Kuwait, Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Qatar, UAE, and Oman.

[86] For more on this, see: Janardhan, "Non-Ideological, Strategic Convergence of the Gulf States' 'Look East' and India's 'Think West' Policies", *Journal of Arabian Studies* 12.2 (December 2022), pp. 160–184.

Bibliography

1 Primary sources

1.1 Site visits

Bahrain: Manama, Muharraq.
India: Mumbai, Goa, Kerala (Cochin/Kochi, Kodungallur, Kottayam), New Delhi, Jaipur.
Iran: Bushehr, Kish island, Charrak, Bandar Mughu, Bandar Lengeh, Bandar Kong, Bandar Abbas, Qeshm island, Hormuz island, Yazd, Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran, Karaj.
Kuwait: Kuwait City, Failaka island.
Oman: Muscat (including Muttrah), Sohar, Nizwa.
Qatar: Wakra, Doha, Umm Salal Muhammed, Al-Khor, Huwaila, Fuwayrit, Ruwais, Jumail, Khuwayr (Khor Hassan), Zubara.
UAE: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah.

1.2 Interviews (conversations and correspondence):

Countless conversations, texts, and emails with colleagues and friends informed my thinking about Indo-Gulf connections over the course of two decades, most notably:

Agius, Dionisius A. (historian of Gulf maritime heritage, University of Exeter, UK), multiple conversations, 2007–12.
Ahmad, Rizwan (scholar of Gulf-India cultural connections, Qatar University, Doha), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2016–24.
Al-Ibrahim, Yacoub (head of Kuwaiti merchant family with historical connections with Bombay), multiple conversations, 2008–19.
Bandyopadhyay, Soumyen (architect and architectural historian of the Gulf and India, University of Liverpool, UK), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2016–24.
Bishara, Ahmed (historian of Gulf-Indian Ocean connections, University of Virginia), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2005–24.
Carter, Robert (Gulf archaeologist, UCL Qatar; later Qatar Museums, Doha), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2012–24.
Cooper, John P. (Gulf maritime archaeologist and ethnographer, University of Exeter, UK), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2008–24.
Goswami, Chayya (historian of Gulf-India connections, Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2012–24.
Janardhan, N. (scholar of Gulf-India connections, Gulf Research Center, Dubai; later, Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, Abu Dhabi, UAE), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2003–24.
Kidambi, Prashant (historian of Bombay, University of Leicester, UK), multiple conversations and correspondence, 1999–2022.
Ilias, M.H. (historian of Gulf-India connections, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi; later Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala, India), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2008–24.
Jashanmal, Tony (CEO of Jashanmal), conversations and correspondence, 2010.
Pasha, A.K. (scholar of Gulf-India connections, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), multiple conversations and correspondence, 2003–24.

Purecha, Vimal (partner of Ratansi Purshottam & Company and senior member of the Kachchhi community in Muttrah, Oman), correspondence and conversations, November 2015, December 2019, February 2024, January 2025.

Rao Mehta, Sandhya (scholar of Oman-India connections, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman), correspondence and conversations, November–December 2015, December 2019, February 2024.

Seyeed, Dr Mohamed (President, Cheraman Juma Masjid Committee, Kodungallur, Kerala, India), December 2023, December 2024.

Toprani, Muneer (member of the Toprani family of Kachchhi merchants in Muttrah that has lived in Oman since the 16th century), February 2024.

Vora, Neha (scholar of Gulf-India connections, Lafayette College, Pennsylvania, USA; later American University of Sharjah, UAE), multiple conversations, 2005–24.

1.3 Written accounts:

Al-Ramhormuzi, Buzurg Ibn Shahriyār, *The Book of the Wonders of India: Mainland, Sea and Islands*, edited by G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville (London: East-West Publications, 1981).

Al-Sīrāfī, Abū Zayd, *Al-kitāb akhbār al-Ṣīn wa-l-Hind* [الكتاب أخبار الصين والهند, Accounts of China and India] (303 AH / 915/916 CE), Bibliothèque nationale de France: Arabe 2281, folios 24–56.

———, *Anciennes relations des Indes et de la Chine* [Ancient Relations of India and China], translated by Eusèbe Renaudot (Paris: Chez Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1718).

Anon., *Sindbad and Other Stories from the Arabian Nights*, translated by Husain Haddawy (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

Bahrain correspondent, "Peace on the Persian Gulf", *The Times*, 22 December 1945, p. 5.

Burdett, Anita L.P. (ed.), *Records of the Persian Gulf Pearl Fisheries 1857–1962* (Gerrards Cross, UK: Archive Editions, 1995).

Cuneiform tablet *c*.2334–2279 BCE, Akkadian Empire, Iraq, image no. 296512, object no. B13972, Penn Museum, USA.

Government of India, Foreign Department, *Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the Years 1904–1905* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906; republished by Archive Editions, 1986).

———, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, *Department of Commerce, Export Import Data Bank (EIDB)*, "Region-Wise All Commodities" databases, accessed April 2024, https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/default.asp.

———, Ministry of External Affairs, Consular Services "Population of Overseas Indians" (NRIs and PIOs combined), December 2024, www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm.

India Office, Political and Secret Department, "Muscat: Date Trade: Indian Tariff on Muscat Dates, 1931–1947", IOR/L/PS/12/2965, British Library, available on the Qatar Digital Library, www.QDL.qa.

Penelope Tuson (ed.), *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports, 1905–1940* (Gerrards Cross, UK: Archive Editions, 1987).

Saldanha, Jerome A. (ed.), *Précis on Commerce and Communications in the Persian Gulf, 1801–1905* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906; reprinted by Archive Editions, 1986).

Severin, Tim, *The Sindbad Voyage* (New York: Putnam, 1982).

Tibbetts, G.R. (ed.), *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese, being a Translation of Kitāb al-Fawā'id fī uṣūl al-baḥr wa'l-qawā'id of Aḥmad b. Mājid al-Najdī* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1981).

Villiers, Alan, *Sons of Sindbad: An Account of Sailing with the Arabs in Their Dhows in the Red Sea, around the Coasts of Arabia, and to Zanzibar and Tanganyika; Pearling in the Persian Gulf; and the Life of the Shipmasters and the Mariners of Kuwait* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940; republished by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1969 and by Arabian Publishing in 2006).

———, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Museum Press, 1952), published in the USA as *Monsoon Seas: The Story of the Indian Ocean* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952).

1.4 Images (art, artefacts, maps, photos, seals, stamps):

"Abbasbhai Hatimbhai shop, Manama souq, *c*.1940s" (photograph), Bahrain National Museum, Manama.

Bilibin, Ivan Yakovlevich, "Sindbad the Sailor", colour lithograph, 1932, series of murals depicting scenes from *The Arabian Nights* (Paris: Librairie Fernand Nathan et Compagnie, 1931–1932), Sotheby's, New York.

Burchardt, Hermann, "Jāssim bin Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Doha, 1904" (photograph) © bpk-Bildagentur / Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Hermann Burchardt collection, Foto K581.

Cram, George Franklin, *Cram's Atlas of the World, Ancient and Modern*, New Census Edition (New York: George F. Cram, 1901).

Cylinder seal of Shu-ilishu, city of Akkad, Iraq, *c*.2200–2113 BCE, item AO 22310, Département des Antiquités orientales, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jagor, Andreas Fedor, "A Mappila Ruler in Kerala: Sultan ʿAbd al-Raḥman I, the ʿAlī Raja of Kannur (Cananore), *c*.1859–61" (photograph) © bpk-Bildagentur / Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Andreas Fedor Jagor collection, Foto VIII C 166.

Knox, Stuart and Ethel, *Photo Album of the Persian Gulf, 1907–12.*

Onley, James, Persian Gulf stamp collection.

Purecha, Vimal (Partner of Ratansi Purshottam & Co.), private photo collection.

Sharjah Maritime Museum (UAE), "Trade Winds" wall map (photo by James Onley, 2023).

Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum, Qatar, Item FBQ.226: An Arab Chest.

Storrs-Fox, Rev. Edwin Aubrey, *Album of Tour of the Persian Gulf*, British Library, Photo 496/6/2: "Arab Dhow, Karachi, December 1916".

2 Secondary sources

Abu-Lughod, Janet, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Agius, Dionisius A., *In the Wake of the Dhow: The Arabian Gulf and Oman* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2002).

———, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: The People of the Dhow* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

Ahmad, Rizwan, "Trading Words: Understanding Contact between Nations", *The Kuwait Times*, 24 June 2008.

———, "Waqt, Chaawal and Bollywood: The Deep Relationship between Indians and Arabs", *The Print*, 2 December 2018.

Aiyar, Swaminathan S. Anklesaria, "Indian Nationalism and the Historical Fantasy of a Golden Hindu Period", *Policy Analysis* 951 (21 June 2023).

Alam, Muzaffar, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics", *Modern Asian Studies* 32.2 (May 1998), pp. 317–349

Albedwawi, Saif, "Pearl Merchants of the Gulf and Their Life in Bombay", *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 47: Papers from the Fiftieth Meeting of the Seminar for Arabian Studies held at the British Museum, London, 29 to 31 July 2016* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2017), pp. 1–7.

Al-Etaibi, Abdulla, "Qatar's New National Narrative: The Influence of Post-Blockade Security Diversification", *Insights* 284 (13 September 2022), pp. 1–20.

Al-Hijji, Yacoub Yusuf, *The Art of Dhow-Building in Kuwait* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2001).

Allen, Calvin H., "The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44.1 (January 1981), pp. 39–53.

Al-Nakib, Farah, "Modernity and the Arab Gulf States", in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics* (London: Routledge, 2020), chap. 7.

AlMutawa, Rana, "Monolithic Representations and Orientalist Credence in the UAE", *Gulf Affairs: Oxford Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, Autumn 2016, pp. 22–25.

Alpers, Edward A. and Chhaya Goswami (eds), *Transregional Trade and Traders: Situating Gujarat in the Indian Ocean from Early Times to 1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Al-Rasheed, Madawi, Transnational Connections and National Identity: Zanzibari Omanis in Muscat", in Paul Dresch and James Piscatori (eds), *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), chap. 4.

Arasaratnam, S., "Recent Trends in the Historiography of the Indian Ocean, 1500 to 1800", *Journal of World History* 1.2 (Fall 1990), pp. 225–248.

Barendse, R.J., *The Arabian Seas, 1640–1700* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1998). Barendse later published an expanded version of this book, with 123 more pages, as *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2002; repr. by Routledge, 2015).

———, *Arabian Seas 1700–1763*, 4 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Beaujard, Philippe, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean: A Global History*, vol. 1: *From the Fourth Millennium BCE to the Sixth Century CE*; vol. 2: *From the Seventh Century to the Fifteenth Century CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Benjamin, Naseeb, "Arab Merchants of Bombay and Surat (*c*.1800–1840)", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13.1 (January–March 1976), pp. 85–95.

Bhacker, M. Redha, "The Cultural Unity of the Gulf and the Indian Ocean: A *Longue Durée* Historical Perspective" in Lawrence G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 173–188.

Bhandare, Shailendra. "Money on the Move: The Rupee and the Indian Ocean Region", in Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (eds), *Cross Currents and Community Networks*: *The History of the Indian Ocean World* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 206–244.

Bishara, Fahad Ahmad, "Mapping the Indian Ocean World of Gulf Merchants, c.1870–1960" in Abdul Sheriff and Engseng Ho (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London: Hurst & Co., 2014), pp. 69–93.

———, "Ships Passing in the Night? Reflections on the Middle East in the Indian Ocean", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48.4 (November 2016), pp. 758–762.

———, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

———, "The Many Voyages of *Fateh Al-Khayr*: Unfurling the Gulf in the Age of Oceanic History", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52.3 (August 2020), pp. 397–412.

Bishara, Fahad Ahmad and Patricia Risso, "The Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the Arab World" in J.E. Peterson (ed.), *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 159–186.

Blyth, Robert J., *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858–1947* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Borsa, Giorgio, "Recent Trends in Indian Ocean Historiography, 1500–1800", *Il Politico* 53.4 (148) (October–December 1988), pp. 679–690.

Bose, Sugata, "Space and Time on the Indian Ocean Rim: Theory and History" in Leila Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (eds), *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), chapter 17, reprinted in chapter 1 of Bose's *A Hundred Horizons* listed below.

———, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Braudel, Fernand, *The Mediterranean in the Time of Philip II*, 2 vols, translated by Siân Reynolds from the 1949 French edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

———, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th–18th Century*, vol. 1: *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, translated by Siân Reynolds from the 1979 French edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

———, "History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée", translated by Immanuel Wallerstein from the 1958 French edition, *Review* [of the Fernand Braudel Center] 32.2: *Commemorating the Longue Durée* (2009), pp. 171–203.

Carter, Robert, "The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48.2 (2005), pp. 139–209.

———, *Sea of Pearls: Arabia, Persia, and the Industry that Shaped the Gulf* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2012).

Chandra, Satish (ed.), *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage, 1987).

Chaudhuri, K.N., *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

———, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

———, "The Unity and Disunity of Indian Ocean History from the Rise of Islam to 1750: The Outline of a Theory and Historical Discourse", *Journal of World History* 4.1 (Spring 1993), pp. 1–21.

Chaudhuri, Pramit Pal, "Think West to Go West: Origins and Implications of India's West Asia Policy Under Modi", Parts I and II, Middle East Institute, 26 September 2017 and 24 October 2017.

Cole, Juan, "Iranian Culture and South Asia, 1500–1900", in Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (eds), *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 15–35.

Constable, Anthony R. and William Facey (eds), *The Principles of Arab Navigation* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2013).

Curtin, Philip D., *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

e Cunha, João Teles, "Portugal: Relations with Persia in the Early Modern Age (1500–1750)", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2001).

———, "The Portuguese in the Persian Gulf", Lawrence G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 207–234.

Dale, Stephen Frederick, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Darley-Doran, Robert and the Central Bank of Bahrain, *History of Currency in the State of Bahrain* (London: Bahrain Monetary Agency, 1996).

Das Gupta, Ashin, *Merchants of Maritime India, 1500–1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate 1994, reprinted by Routledge, 2016).

———, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta*, compiled by Uma Das Gupta (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Das Gupta, Ashin and Michael N. Pearson (eds), *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500–1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Donaldson, Neil, *The Postal Agencies in Eastern Arabia and the Gulf*, Harry Hayes Philatelic Study 14 (Batley, West Yorkshire: Harry Hayes, 1975).

Eaton, Richard, *India in the Persianate Age, 1000–1765* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

Edens, Christopher, "Indus-Arabian Interaction during the Bronze Age: A Review of Evidence", in Gregory L. Possehl (ed.), *Harappan Civilization*, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 335–363.

Erskine-Loftus, Pamela; Mariam Al-Mulla; and Victoria Hightower (eds), *Representing the Nation: Heritage, Museums, Identity and National Narratives in the Arab Gulf States* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Floor, Willem, *The Persian Gulf: A Political and Economic History of Five Port Cities, 1500–1730* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2006).

Frank, Andre Gunder, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998).

Freeman-Grenville, G.S.P., "Some Thoughts on Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar Al-Ramhormuzi: *The Book of the Wonders of India*", *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 28 (1982), pp. 63–70.

Ḥabrah, Muṣṭafa ʿIzzat, *Mawsūʿat al-ghawṣ wa-al-luʾluʾ fī mujtamaʿ al-Imārāt wa-al-Khalīj al-ʿArabī qabla al-nafṭ* [The Encyclopaedia of Diving and Pearls in Emirati and Arabian Gulf Society Before Oil] (Raʾs al-Khaimah: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa-al-wathāʾiq, 2004–05)

Hassan J., Manu T., Sukesh Kumaradas, and A.K. Ampotti, "Arab Accounts of Malabar History: The Early Episodes", *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 8.1 (2020), pp. 791–810.

Hofmeyr, Isabel, "Universalizing the Indian Ocean", *PMLA* 125.3 (May 2010), pp. 721–729.

Hourani, George, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

Jain, Rupam and Tom Lasseter, "Cultural Revolution: By Rewriting History, Hindu Nationalists Aim to Assert Their Dominance over India", *Reuters*, 6 March 2018.

Janardhan, N. (ed.), *The Arab Gulf's Pivot to Asia: From Transactional to Strategic Partnerships* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020).

Janardhan, N., "India's "Think West" Matches Gulf's "Look East" Policy", in N. Janardhan (ed.), *The Arab Gulf's Pivot to Asia: From Transactional to Strategic Partnerships* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020), pp. 81–96.

———, "Non-Ideological, Strategic Convergence of the Gulf States' 'Look East' and India's 'Think West' Policies", *Journal of Arabian Studies* 12.2 (December 2022), pp. 160–184.

Jones, Stephanie, "British Indian Steamers and the Trade of the Persian Gulf, 1862–1914", *The Great Circle: Journal of the Australian Association for Maritime History* 7.1 (April 1985), pp. 23–44.

———, "The Management of British India Steamers in the Gulf 1862–1945: Gray MacKenzie and the Mesopotamia Persia Corporation", in Richard I. Lawless (ed.), *The Gulf in the Early 20th Century: Foreign Institutions and Local Responses* (Durham: University of Durham Press, 1986), pp. 25–63.

Kearney, Milo, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Kelly, Marjorie, "Location and Nation: Embodying Kuwait's National Narrative", in Sarina Wakefield (ed.), *Museums of the Arabian Peninsula: Historical Developments and Contemporary Discourses* (London: Routledge, 2020), chap. 7.

Kia, Mana, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

Kuczkiewicz-Fraś, Agnieszka, *Perso-Arabic Loanwords in Hindustani* (Krakow: Jagiellonian University, 2008).

Laursen, Steffen and Piotr Steinkeller, *Babylonia, the Gulf Region, and the Indus: Archaeological and Textual Evidence for Contact in the Third and Early Second Millennium B.C.* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2017).

Levi, Scott C., *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

Low, Michael Christopher, "Introduction: The Indian Ocean and Other Middle Easts", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34.3 (2014), pp. 549–555.

Lunde, Paul, "Sailing Times in Sulaymān al-Mahrī" and "Appendix 2: Sulaymān al-Mahrī's Sailing Times according to the Yazdagird Calendar for the Year AD 1511", in Anthony R. Constable and William Facey (eds), *The Principles of Arab Navigation* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2013), pp. 75–82, 119–126.

Mangrio, Riaz Ahmed, *The Morphology of Loanwords in Urdu: The Persian, Arabic and English Strands* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

Margariti, Roxani, "An Ocean of Islands: Islands, Insularity, and Historiography of the Indian Ocean", in Peter N. Miller (ed.), *The Sea: Thalassography and Historiography Book* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 198–229.

Markovits, Claude, *The Global World of Indian Merchants: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

———, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Markovits, Claude; Jacques Pouchepadass; and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).

Martin, Marina, "Hundi/Hawala: The Problem of Definition", *Modern Asian Studies* 43.4 (July 2009), pp. 909–937.

Mathew, Johan, *Margins of the Market: Trafficking and Capitalism across the Arabian Sea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

———, "Khaliji Hindustan: Towards a Diasporic History of Khalijis in South Asia 1780s–1960s", in Alan James Fromherz (ed.), *The Gulf in World History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 120–135.

Matthee, Rudi, "The Portuguese Presence in the Persian Gulf: An Overview", in Jeffrey R. Macris and Saul Kelly (eds), *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), pp. 1–12.

McPherson, Kenneth, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Mohamed, K.M. and K.M. Mohammad, "Arab Relations with Malabar Coast from 9th to 16th Centuries", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 60 (1999), pp. 226–234.

Morton, Michael Quentin, "The British India Line in the Arabian Gulf", *Liwa*: *Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research* 5.10 (December 2013), pp. 40–63.

Mukherjee, Rila, *India in the Indian Ocean World: From the Earliest Times to 1800 CE* (Singapore: Springer, 2022).

Olijdam, Eric and Richard H. Spoor (eds), *Intercultural Relations between South and Southwest Asia: Studies in Commemoration of E.C.L. During Caspers (1934–1996)* (Oxford: Archeaopress, 2008; reprinted by BAR Publishing, 2016).

Omani government, *Jewel of Muscat* website, https://jewelofmuscat.tv.

Onley, James, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

———, "Indian Communities in the Persian Gulf, *c.*1500–1947", in Lawrence G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times: Ports, Peoples and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 231–266.

Onley, James and Sandhya Rao Mehta, "The Hindu Community in Muscat: Making Homes in the Diaspora", *Journal of Arabian Studies* 5.2 (December 2015), pp. 156–183.

Panikkar, K.M., *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1945, 2nd edn 1951).

Parsons, Alan, *The Indian Postal Agencies in the Persian Gulf Area* (London: Sahara Publications, 2001).

Partrick, Neil, "Nationalism in the Gulf States", in David Held and Kristian Ulrichsen (eds), *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order* (London: Routledge, 2012), chap. 2.

Parvez, Zarqa, "Nation-Building in the Post-Colonial Qatari State: The Politics and History of Nationalism", *Review of Middle East Studies* (2025), pp. 1–33.

Patel, Alka and Touraj Daryaee (eds), *India and Iran in the Long Durée* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

Peterson, J.E., "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman", *Middle East Journal* 58.1 (Winter 2004), pp. 32–51.

Potts, Daniel, *Feast of Dates* (Abu Dhabi: Trident Press, 2002).

Prakash, Om, "Sarrafs, Financial Intermediation and Credit Network in Mughal India", in Eddy H.G. Van Cauwenbergh (ed.), *Money, Coins and Commerce: Essays in the Monetary History of Asia and Europe (from Antiquity to Modern Times)* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1991), pp. 473–490.

Prange, Sebastian R., "Scholars and the Sea: A Historiography of the Indian Ocean", *History Compass* 6/5 (2008), pp. 1382–1393.

Ray, Himanshu Prabha and Edward A. Alpers (eds), *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Risso, Patricia, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

———, "India and the Gulf: Encounters from the Mid-Sixteenth to Mid-Twentieth Centuries" in Lawrence G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 189–203.

———, "The Geography of Historiography: West Asia as a Sub-Region of the Indian Ocean", in Sami G. Massoud (ed.), *Studies in Islamic Historiography: Essays in Honour of Professor Donald P. Little* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 246–264.

Segal, Eran, "Rulers and Merchants in Pre-Oil Kuwait: The Significance of Palm Dates", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41.2 (April 2014), pp. 167–182.

Shafiq, Suhanna, *Seafarers of the Seven Seas: The Maritime Culture in the* Kitāb ʿAjāʾib al-Hind *(The Book of the Marvels of India) by Buzurg Ibn Shahriyār (d. 399/1009)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020).

Sheriff, Abdul, *Dhow Culture of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

———, "Globalisation with a Difference: An Overview" in Abdul Sheriff and Engseng Ho (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London: Hurst & Co., 2014), pp. 11–41.

Sheriff, Abdul and Engseng Ho (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London: Hurst & Co., 2014).

Spooner, Brian, and William L. Hanaway (eds), *Literacy in the Persianate World Writing and the Social Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012).

Toussaint, Auguste, *History of the Indian Ocean*, translated by June Guicharnaud from the 1961 French edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966).

Traub, Alex, "India's Dangerous New Curriculum," *New York Review of Books*, 6 December 2018.

Truschke, Audrey, "Censoring Indian History", *History Today*, August 2017, pp. 14–17.

———, "Hindutva's Dangerous Rewriting of History", *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 24–25 (2020), pp. 1–15.

———, "Hindutva's Threat to Academic Freedom", *Regional News Service*, 7 July 2021.

———, "Hindu Supremacists Threaten Academic Freedom in the United States", *Academic Blog*, 18 September 2021.

———, "Hindu: A History", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65.2 (April 2023), pp. 246–271.

Unwin, Sheila, *The Arab Chest* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2006).

Varrel, Aurélie, "Art and Migration to the Gulf: Unpacking the 'Binary States, India-UAE' Exhibition at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale", *Journal of Arabian Studies* 11.2 (December 2021), pp. 277–288.

Villiers, Alan, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Museum Press, 1952), published in the USA as *Monsoon Seas: The Story of the Indian Ocean* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952).

Vink, Markus P.M., "Indian Ocean Studies and the 'New Thalassology'", *Journal of Global History* 2.1 (March 2007), pp. 41–62.

Visweswaran, Kamala; Michael Witzel; Nandini Manjrekar; Dipta Bhog; and Uma Chakravarti, "The Hindutva View of History: Rewriting Textbooks in India and the United States", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 10.1 (Winter/Spring 2009), pp. 101–112.

Vosmer, Tom, "The Jewel of Muscat: Reconstructing a Ninth-Century Sewn-Plank Boat" in Alison Effeny (ed.), *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds Book* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 2010), pp. 120–135. Available online at https://asia-archive.si.edu/research/exhibition-catalogues/shipwrecked-catalog/.

Wikipedia, "Pakistani Diaspora", December 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistani_diaspora.

Wink, André, *Al-Hind, The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*:

- Vol. I: *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, 7th–11th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990; 2nd edn, 1991; 3rd edn, 1996, eBook, 2002).
- Vol. II: *The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest, 11th–13th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1997, eBook, 2002).
- Vol. III: *Indo-Islamic Society, 14th–15th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
- Vol. IV: *Age of the Great Mughals, 16th–17th Centuries*, Part One: *Afghans and Mughals in the Struggle* (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

Yajima, Hikoichi, *The Arab Dhow Trade in the Indian Ocean* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1976).

———, "Maritime Activities of the Arab Gulf People and the Indian Ocean World in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 14 (1977), pp. 195–208.